

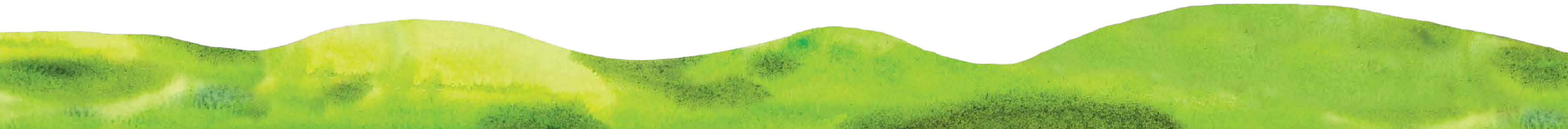
*Community**in**Bloom*

Stories from Our Community Gardens



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Published by
NATIONAL PARKS BOARD
Singapore Botanic Gardens
1 Cluny Road
Singapore 259569

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First published 2025

Community in Bloom – Stories from Our Community Gardens
ISBN: 978-981-94-3649-1

This book was printed on material certified by PEFT
(The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification)

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Community *in* Bloom

Stories from Our Community Gardens



FOREWORD

Singapore is widely recognised as one of the greenest cities in the world. Our green spaces, woven throughout our urban fabric, are what make it truly liveable.

These greening efforts are possible with the strong support of our community – of which the Community in Bloom (CIB) initiative is a cornerstone. Launched by NParks in 2005 to ignite an interest in gardening, CIB has truly blossomed into a vibrant community initiative. Today, we have over 2,000 community gardens in the CIB network, up from less than 200 when we first started.

These thriving gardens bring nature to our doorsteps, foster connections between neighbours, and they also act as pockets of green space to bring respite to our daily lives. Our gardeners have even leveraged these gardens to reach out to the community, such as through harvest sharing and gardening workshops.

As community gardeners from all walks of life come together, caring for their plants, connecting over common interests, and sharing their passions with the community, each garden transforms into a living story. To date, more than 100 CIB Ambassadors — exemplary community gardeners who actively share their knowledge and expertise while leading projects to enhance green spaces — have been appointed.

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the CIB initiative, NParks has worked with the community to put together this commemorative book. This book shares the stories of 20 community gardens in housing estates, schools and organisations. These stories share the lasting friendships forged over the love of gardening and showcase our community gardeners' efforts as stewards of urban greenery and horticultural innovation.

It is my hope that more people will come together to grow the CIB network and take part in such community-led greening initiatives. I am excited to see how Singapore's community garden network will continue to evolve and grow in the future.

Indranee Rajah

*Minister, Prime Minister's Office,
Second Minister for Finance and
Second Minister for National Development*





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INTRODUCTION



In 2005, the National Parks Board (NParks) launched the Community in Bloom (CIB) initiative to promote a vibrant gardening culture across Singapore. This programme aims to foster a sense of civic ownership and community stewardship by encouraging the creation and development of community gardens throughout the island.

From its modest beginnings involving a few pilot gardens, CIB has grown to include over 2,000 community gardening groups across the nation. Our urban landscapes are now dotted with flourishing green sanctuaries at various locations, set up by a diverse range of people:

- **HDB estates:** Residents work together to transform underutilised areas into lush spaces with fresh produce and ornamental plants while strengthening community bonds.
- **Private estates:** Enthusiastic gardeners in condominiums and landed properties work together to green their neighbourhoods and create friendships.
- **Schools:** Educational institutions embrace community gardens as outdoor classrooms, using them to teach sustainability, biodiversity, and food security.

- **Organisations:** Workplaces and voluntary groups create gardens that promote wellness, social cohesion, and environmental awareness.

These green spaces are not just about plants – they are about people coming together to nurture both greenery and community spirit. The benefits of community gardening are beautifully captured in this commemorative book's three main themes: growing deep-rooted friendships, sowing the seeds of community and showcasing beauty and creativity.

In every garden bed and along every garden path, residents find opportunities to connect. Neighbours gather to plant, harvest, and share the fruits of their labour, while building friendships that span generations and backgrounds.

Community gardens have also become hubs of outreach and learning. Gardening groups organise workshops, tours, and events that welcome the wider community into their green sanctuaries. They share gardening tips, harvests, and stories, creating platforms for neighbours to learn from one another and foster a sense of togetherness.

NParks supports these gardening groups, offering horticultural advice, technical assistance, and resources, as well as runs programmes that inspire creativity and engage community gardeners. NParks also identifies outstanding gardeners and appoints them as CIB Ambassadors, who share their expertise with other gardening groups by giving talks and conducting workshops.

Community gardens play a crucial role in realising Singapore's City in Nature vision. By restoring nature within urban areas, these gardens help support biodiversity, improve air quality, and create a healthier and more liveable city.

As we celebrate 20 years of CIB, let us look at how these gardens show what it means to care for both nature and one another, as they bring biodiversity and greenery into our neighbourhoods, nurture stronger communities, and contribute to Singapore's climate resilience.



GROWING DEEP-ROOTED FRIENDSHIPS

Gardens that touch the hearts of
others and build vibrant gardening
communities



Celebrating Food, Fun and Friendships



An aerial view of Sky Garden at Jurong Central Zone D RN.

Perched atop Block 372A, Sky Garden at Jurong Central Zone D RN (Residents' Network) is a vibrant green sanctuary transformed from an ordinary multi-storey car park (MSCP) deck.

Since its establishment in 2011, this pioneering project stands as one of Jurong's first successful conversions of an HDB MSCP rooftop into a thriving communal space.

This exemplary community garden has garnered accolades, and its reputation has attracted a diverse array of visitors from across the globe, including Australia and China.

The garden serves as a living classroom where valuable lessons in leadership and community management unfold naturally.



Over the years, this community of gardeners has developed a strong bond of friendship through their common love for gardening.



To residents living on the higher floors nearby, it looks like a Garden of Eden in the sky! Indeed, the garden has a wide variety of plants, which could be placed under three general categories – vegetables, fruits and ornamentals.

The garden's produce is shared among the gardeners and visitors, with flowers planted strategically to attract pollinators. Despite the challenges of rooftop gardening, the space successfully produces Honey Mangoes, Star Fruit, and Guava that match the quality of fruits bought from the supermarket.

The garden's main success is in building community spirit. Members have formed strong friendships, evident in their daily interactions and conversations. They also look out for each other's welfare, checking in when someone misses their gardening duty.

Through shared activities and mutual care, this rooftop garden has become more than a place to grow food – it's where neighbours become friends.

Leadership is very important. If you want to be a leader in a place like this, you have to work closely with the gardeners.

Kamisah Bte Atan
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador





The produce is harvested for the gardeners and residents to enjoy.

Bringing out the Community Spirit

The garden is inclusive and welcomes all skills and contributions. Those who do not do gardening will help by sweeping and keeping the space clean.

“Sometimes a member would bring a packet of mushrooms and we would cook it on the spot using herbs from the garden. Then we would all sit down and eat together. Everything is from the heart,” said Kamisah Bte Atan, the leader of the garden.

Community outreach is a key focus, particularly with young people. The gardeners regularly host student groups ranging from nursery and kindergarten children to secondary school and polytechnic students, sharing their knowledge and experience with the next generation.

Lessons in the Outdoor Classroom

The garden is a metaphor for life. Kamisah takes every opportunity to teach the children life values or bring out a lesson or two from the gardening activities.

Kamisah shared this teaching moment: “On one occasion, a boy asked me, ‘Teacher, teacher, why is the other boy’s seedling taller than mine?’ And I explained to him that plants are like people. Some are taller, others are shorter. It’s all part of nature.”

The garden regularly hosts groups of children and students, fostering their appreciation for plants and nature.



Spreading Joy through Garden Art

The garden’s beauty is not limited to its lush plants; touches of art can be found in the form of fanciful murals, walls and painted rocks all around. Ang Gee Seng, one of the gardeners and the artist of the team, painted the murals and some of the wall frames. He also created many pieces of rock art which can be seen everywhere in the garden. “I come to the garden several times a week with my wife. I like the company and look forward to the group outings they organise,” shared the artist.

I like to paint pictures of kampongs, because I grew up in one.

Ang Gee Seng
Garden Volunteer



The satisfaction of seeing the labour of your hands grow into a plant with fruits is hard to describe!

Tee Sek Eng
Garden Volunteer



Taking Every Opportunity to Celebrate

The community takes every opportunity to use the fruits of their labour to celebrate festive events. During Hari Raya, the gardeners made *lontong* with the long beans and spices from the garden.

For Chinese New Year, Kamisah created her own version of *yusheng*, replacing traditional ingredients with fresh herbs and vegetables from the garden. Her adaptation features more aromatic herbs than sweet elements. She also customises the dish by using different grains – basmati, white and brown rice – to promote healthy eating options.



Gardening Tip!

If you are thinking of setting up your own rooftop garden, opt for plants with lower watering requirements and choose drought-resistant varieties. Your chances of growing edibles successfully can be enhanced by using shade netting and an irrigation system, and by fertilising the soil regularly to provide nutrition for the plants.



Nasi Ulam 'yusheng'

Made with a variety of herbs, this refreshing salad hints of the flavours from the Malay herbed rice dish, *nasi ulam*.

Serves 5

Ingredients:

4 bowls of cooked rice

The following items to be thinly sliced:

- 1 inch young ginger
- 1 inch young galangal
- 3 stalks lemongrass
- 1 torch ginger
- 5 shallots
- 1 handful basil leaves
- 1 handful mint leaves
- 1 handful *ulam raja* leaves
- 6 *daun kadok* (wild pepper)
- 5 young roselle leaves
- 5 long beans
- 5 angled beans
- 5 sawtooth coriander leaves
- 8 kaffir lime leaves
- 2 chilli padi (optional)

For garnish:

- 2 tablespoons roasted coconut
- 2 tablespoons fried shallot
- 2 tablespoons *ikan bilis* or salted fish

Steps:

1. Mix the rice with prepared ingredients.
2. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Add garnishing ingredients.
4. Combine thoroughly and serve alongside *sambal belacan* and lime wedges.

Winter Melon (*Benincasa hispida*)

An annual vine that spreads up to 5 m across. It has large lobed leaves and tendrils that readily 'climb' trellises. Striking yellow, male and female flowers are borne separately on the same plant, attracting bees. The young fruit is velvety and gradually develop a waxy white coating. Mature Winter Melon fruit can be up to 45 cm long! It prefers bright, filtered sunlight with well-drained soil enriched with organic matter, essential for optimal fruit production.



Fantasy Landscape

The garden is beautifully landscaped with Japanese-inspired rock gardens and rest areas. One stretch of pathway has a ribbed tunnel with giant butterflies and dragonflies. They bring colour and cheer to the open space.



Grapes (*Vitis vinifera*)

A vigorous climber with a twining growth habit, which can reach 20 m in length! It requires trellises for support and grows well under full sun, regular watering and deep, well-drained soil.



Layout of Sky Garden at Jurong Central Zone D RN.

Peanut Butter Fruit (*Bunchosia armeniaca*)

A small tree that can reach up to 5 m tall in cultivation. It grows well under full sun with regular watering and produces egg-shaped fruit that ripen to an orange-red colour. The orange-red pulp tastes like peanut butter and is consumed fresh or made into jams and jellies by the locals in tropical South America.



Sandpaper Vine (*Petrea volubilis*)

A woody climber with attractive star-shaped flowers that are pale blue to violet in colour. The sepals remain on the flower stalks even after the flowers have fallen. This climber grows well under full sun on moist, well-drained soil.





Reaching Out to the Community



(From left)
The gardening group members Wee Liang Pin, Law Moi Hwa and Jason Ong have built strong friendships that extend beyond the garden.

Toh Yi RN (Residents' Network) Community Garden brings residents together to enjoy the beauty of plants and to bond. It was only in 2012 that a group of residents decided to breathe new life into this plot of land, which used to be an old run-down garden.

A committee was formed for this purpose. For almost a year, they went around the island looking at other established gardens to get ideas on how to design, organise and run the garden, and make it more accessible to residents in the area.

The garden follows a thoughtful design: ornamental plants line the perimeter to provide a colourful border, vegetable and herb plots are situated in the central area to receive optimal sunlight, and larger fruit trees occupy the rear space. The layout also includes a storage shed, transplanting corner, and dedicated rest areas.



Bonding as a Community

The gardening group encourages community bonding in many ways. They welcome new volunteers, who can choose to work on the vegetables, fruits or ornamental plots. Each volunteer is assigned to a small team of two or three people working on a shared plot. When families join as volunteers, family members are encouraged to join different teams, giving them opportunities to interact with other community members.



Involving the Community

National University of Singapore Community Trail

The garden is privileged to be included in the Community Trail, a guided tour of the area featuring stops at temples, cultural and historical landmarks, and other places of interest. The garden regularly hosts groups of visitors from both within and outside the area. This has motivated its gardeners to continuously improve the garden.

Contributing Compost

Every Tuesday and Saturday at designated times, residents bring their kitchen waste – vegetables, eggshell and other food, except meat – to contribute to the garden's compost pile. Interestingly, children often remind their parents about these composting sessions, demonstrating how this practice instils values of community involvement and environmental conservation in younger generations.

Sharing the Bounty

The vegetables and fruits in the garden are harvested regularly and distributed to the gardeners and residents. During festive occasions or special events, the garden shares its produce with residents of the welfare homes in the area and Bukit Timah Community Club. This is the garden's way of giving back to the community.

The gardeners produce a rich variety of fruits and vegetables, including grapes, bitter melon, lady's fingers, and sword beans.



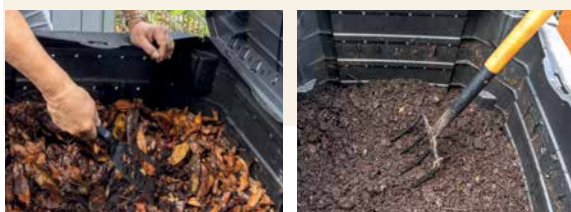
The composting bins generate nutrient-rich compost to nourish the garden soil.

What is Composting?

Composting is a process where organic material is broken down by bacteria and other microorganisms via decomposition. The resulting material is called compost, which can be used for gardening. There are several methods of composting.

In traditional composting, organic materials that are either nitrogen-rich ('greens') or carbon-rich ('browns') are combined in a container or heap. Sometimes, garden soil or existing compost is added to introduce soil microbes and start the decomposition process. Under appropriate conditions – such as sufficient aeration and regular mixing with garden tools – this organic mixture breaks down into compost over several weeks.

Other methods of composting include Bokashi and vermicomposting.



Proper composting plays a vital role to successful gardening. The garden uses the traditional method, which breaks down food waste into compost through an aerobic process requiring oxygen.

Wee Liang Pin
Garden Leader



Our Plant Care Clinic

The plant doctor, Jason Ong, has been helping residents nurse their sick plant to health. Initially, he provided this service informally, but as word spread, demand for his expertise grew. The garden is now considering extending this service to all residents in the area.

Jason created this sculpture, coaxing scrap material into the shape of a turtle. The bottom piece is a broken plastic flower-pot base. And he made little cups to look like the details on its shelled back.



Bee Hotel

Inspired by a bee hotel they had seen, the garden volunteers decided to create one in their garden. They began by drilling holes in a small wooden box to serve as the bee hotel. They planted flowering plants near it and explored various ways to attract bees. Although the bee hotel's occupancy rate is very low, the volunteers remain determined to improve it.



Coral Vine (*Antigonon leptopus*)

A fast-growing climber that can grow up to 12 m long. It has heart-shaped leaves and showy, bright pink flowers that attract bees and butterflies. This prolific bloomer thrives in full sun and performs best when grown on sturdy trellises.



Stevia (*Stevia rebaudiana*)

An herbaceous plant that can reach 1 m tall in cultivation. Its oval shaped leaves can be used fresh or dried in salads or infused in teas to add sweetness. The compound, stevioside, found in the plant is reported to be 25 to 30 times sweeter than table sugar! The plant prefers partial shade, moderate watering on well-draining soil and regular pruning to encourage leaf growth.

Trailing Watermelon Begonia (*Procris repens*)

A creeper native to Singapore with semi-fleshy leaves adorned with ornamental dark and light green banding, resembling the pattern of watermelon rinds. Preferring moist, shady spots, it is best grown as a ground cover or in hanging baskets where stems can reach 60 cm long.



Layout of Toh Yi RN Community Garden.



Cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*)

The cottony, white fibre is part of the fruit that protects the egg-shaped seeds. It is also in the same family as the Hibiscus!



Lady's Fingers (*Abelmoschus esculentus*)

An annual herbaceous plant commonly grown for its edible fruit pods. The long, finger-like pods are best harvested young and are widely used in Southeast Asian cuisine. The flowers of this species and its cultivars bloom for a single day in shades of pink, orange-red and red. This sun-loving plant thrives in fertile, well-draining soil.



All for One, and One for All

The gardening community in Bukit Batok resembles an edamame pod with three sections – the Cosy Garden, the Culture & Arts Garden and the Lush Garden.

When May Lee, the chief Garden Leader, started Cosy Garden in 1992, she began with just one plot. Later, she invited Richard Ashworth and Cheryl Wee to join her in expanding the gardening network, leading to the formation of the two adjacent gardens.



Cosy Garden



Culture & Arts Garden



Lush Garden

Like Lalang grass bending with the wind, this garden has adapted to changing circumstances and seized opportunities as they arose. Over the years, all three gardens have earned awards from NParks.

Pushing Each Other to Excel

A single twig breaks easily. A pair offers more resistance. When bundled together, three or more become a sturdy, resilient unit. This wisdom guides the Bukit Batok community gardeners. They cooperate and encourage each other to excel, celebrating their achievements together.



(From left)
The Garden Leaders
May Lee, Cheryl Wee
and Richard Ashworth –
good friends pushing
each other to excel.

COSY GARDEN

Cosy Garden provides two essential resources – water and electrical power – to support itself and the two adjoining gardens.

Tapping on Solar Power

Cosy Garden has five solar panels which generate enough electricity to run all the lights, fans, sprinklers, and the water pumps in the koi pond and hydroponic racks.



Solar panels



Water recycling system



Hydroponics section



The Rat Catcher



Harvesting the Golden Fruit
(Pouteria caimito)

Recycled Water

In Cosy Garden, rainwater is collected and filtered, before being channelled through all the water bodies in the three gardens. Volunteers built from scratch the pump system that circulates water from the catchment tank to the koi pond, turtle tank and other ponds.

Cosy Garden features several bonsai landscapes. The Chinese Garden stands out in particular with its pagodas, pandas and bonsai plants set against an interesting rock formation. There are also figurines of children in kung fu poses.

While Cosy Garden has fewer fruit trees than Lush Garden, it houses one notable rarity. The Golden Fruit (*Pouteria caimito*) resembles a persimmon in taste and appearance but is more rounded and lacks the persimmon's large seeds. Its flesh has a smoother, jelly-like texture.

Repurposed Art

Many of the garden's decorations are crafted from donated or salvaged items. For instance, one plant rack was fashioned from a wooden pallet previously used for stacking crates in a warehouse.

The metal divider at the hydroponic section was donated by a group after their award-winning display at a Singapore flower show.

Harnessing Technology

The garden uses technology wherever possible, including its Rat Catcher, a box-like device mounted along the fence a couple of feet above ground. When a rat is trapped, the device automatically signals the pest control company to collect and dispose of it.

It is nice to win awards. But the joy of gardening and the friendships we develop here in the garden are the biggest rewards we can have.

May Lee
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador

CULTURE & ARTS GARDEN

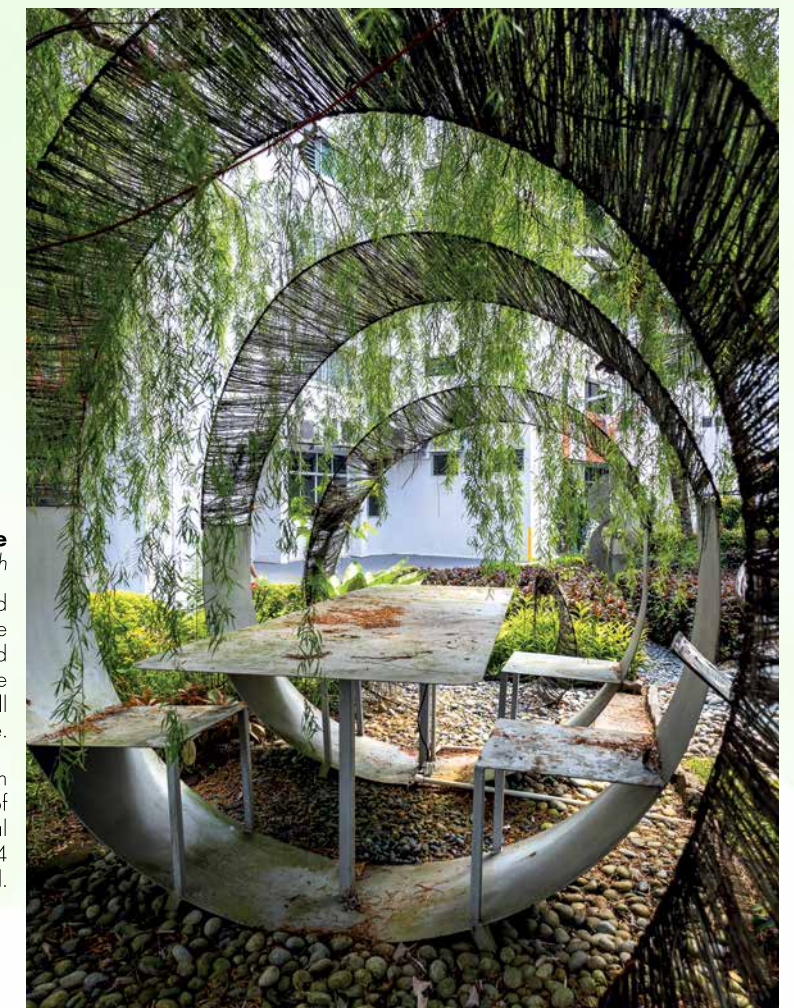


Miracle Dining Table

Artist: Han Ashworth

We all have secret wishes and we all have someone we hope to meet some day. This table and the swoosh surrounding the place where miracles happen and all our wishes come true.

This mixed-medium piece won the Gold Award and the Best of Show at the International Floral Display Competition in the 2014 Singapore Garden Festival.



A Place to Come to for Healing

“Art is healing. When people come here, their spirits are lifted,” continues Richard who took care of his adopted father with dementia for ten years.

Richard involves residents with dementia in basic gardening activities, encouraging them to experience the garden with all their senses – seeing the varied colours of plants, smelling the herbs, and feeling the different leaf textures.

Richard recounts a heartwarming encounter he had with a resident suffering from dementia: “I pointed out a leaf and told him, ‘This is the Sweet Potato leaf’ and he answered back, ‘No... no... this is Chicken Feet leaf’. That’s what people in the old days used to call it because of its shape. I was so happy that I helped him recall the past.”

When Richard first donated some of his sculptures to start the garden, he worried they might be taken for scrap metal. Fortunately, his fears proved unfounded.

Art is healing. When people come here, their spirits are lifted.

Richard Ashworth
Garden Leader & CIB Ambassador



UNITY

Artist: Richard Ashworth

This piece shows a flow of circles coming together to create a better and more harmonious world. It was made from scrap metal salvaged from a metal workshop. It won an award in a 1990 IBM Art Competition.

Message Within

Artist: Han Ashworth

Many of us have something to say to our loved one but are perhaps too shy to say. The metal frame symbolises our heart and the flower, the message that’s waiting to be expressed.



LUSH GARDEN



The nearby F&B outlets donate their coffee dregs for the garden to make its compost.

Cheryl Wee is the Garden Leader of Lush Garden, the most eclectic of the three gardens and home to the largest collection of fruit trees.

The Breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) commands attention with its large ornamental leaves. The garden also features Mangosteen (*Garcinia mangostana*), White Mulberry (*Morus alba*), Chiku (*Manilkara zapota*) and Coffee (*Coffea canephora*).

The gardeners experimented with crossing various varieties of mango and successfully developed a hybrid of the Red Mango (*Mangifera indica*).

Down the Therapeutic Path

A recently constructed wide path runs through the garden, built with low-carbon, recycled concrete slabs and designed to accommodate wheelchairs. One side of this path is lined with plants to stimulate the senses, inviting visitors to experience various herbs through smell and explore different leaf textures – from rough to hairy to smooth.



Most of our volunteers are elderly, so we let them come whenever they like.

Cheryl Wee
Garden Leader & CIB Ambassador



Malay Apple
(*Syzygium malaccense*)

A tree with a dense crown that grows up to 8 m tall. It has showy clusters of bright reddish-pink, pom-pom like flowers and bell-shaped fruit that ripen to bright red. The edible fruit offers a mild sweetness with a subtle rose-like fragrance. While similar in appearance to the Jambu Air (*Syzygium aqueum*), Malay Apple has denser flesh. The tree thrives in full sun and well-ventilated areas.



Mahkota Dewa
(*Phaleria macrocarpa*)

An evergreen tree that typically grows to 6 m tall. Its fragrant small, trumpet-shaped white flowers grow directly on its trunk and branches. The round to oval-shaped fruit ripen to red. Although the plant is used in traditional medicine in Indonesia, its fruit and seeds contain a poisonous substance.



Broad-leaf Fig
(*Ficus auriculata*)

A small, low branching tree that can reach 5 m tall with a wide-spreading crown. It features large eye-catching heart-shaped leaves. Its figs grow in clusters on the branches and trunk. They turn speckled reddish-purple and are edible, fragrant and sweet when ripe. It thrives in full sun but can tolerate partial shade and various soil conditions.



Persian Shield
(*Strobilanthes auriculata* var. *dyeriana*)

A striking ornamental shrub that grows up to 1.2 m tall. It has variegated purple-green leaves with metallic silver streaks, creating a dramatic shimmering effect under light. It performs best in bright, indirect light and well-drained soil, and is ideal for shady gardens or indoor spaces. It complements other foliage plants while adding vivid colour contrast.



Visit the rooftop community garden at Kampung Admiralty, where you will be warmly received. Their welcoming atmosphere was recognised in 2023 with the HDB Singapore's Friendly Neighbourhood Award.

In 2018, Doris Yuen and seniors from NTUC Health Active Ageing Centre began managing the community garden. While developing the space, she observed that a communal area was essential for fostering social connections. This inspired their project to construct a pavilion beside the garden.

The garden has since blossomed into a vibrant gathering spot, bringing together seniors from the Active Ageing Centre and young children from nearby childcare centres who visit regularly.



The gardening community at Kampung Admiralty is always ready to welcome visitors warmly.



The garden pavilion serves as the focal point where residents and visitors gather to chat and share meals.

A Meeting Place

Doris said, "Many residents in the neighbourhood have limited space in their flats and like to go out for fresh air. This is a place where seniors can come to make friends and engage in healthy gardening activities.

"Children also like to come here to study, especially before exams, and we welcome them. The space has become a cherished meeting point for residents from neighbouring blocks, who bring their families here for gatherings and quality time together.

"Many activities are held at the garden, bringing life to the place. Every week, seniors come here to practise *qigong* or play Rummy-O. Another group practices *nagomi*, a Japanese art of finger painting."

International Visitors

The garden has played host to many groups of visitors from Australia, China, Japan, and Russia. Many of them have heard about Kampung Admiralty's innovative integration of amenities for seniors and want to find out how Singapore addresses an ageing population and how retirees live here.

Doris said, "One group from Australia visited and we became friends. I ended up being their tour guide in Singapore. I even brought them to Lau Pa Sat.

"Later, a friend told me that Kampung Admiralty was featured on Australian TV and in a magazine."

I am proud of my volunteers. They are really dedicated. Come rain or shine, they are here.

Doris Yuen
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador





Inclusive Garden Design

The garden features a maze of pathways that allows visitors to stroll through and enjoy the different plants on either side. The wide paths make the garden accessible to all visitors, including those who use wheelchairs. Designed with seniors in mind, the garden's raised planters enable comfortable gardening at an optimal height.

Dedicated Volunteers

Doris has 20 dedicated volunteers who help with gardening and maintaining the garden's cleanliness.

Jenny Koay, a long-time volunteer, helps with the administration work, including social media and the rostering of duties.

Heng Gee Choo and Ah Chwee are the garden's handymen. They build small structures and handle minor repairs.

Gee Choo and Jenny play the glockenspiel, a German xylophone, for the seniors. They play simple songs like 'You Are My Sunshine' and 'Chan Mali Chan.'

Ho Soh Wah and his wife Wong Mimi tend to the three fish tanks. They feed the fish and trim the seaweed. The fish tank water is used to water the garden plants.

Miriam Bte Juma'at and her friend Asmah Bte Majid have been volunteering for two years. They come twice a week for two hours each time, clearing the dry leaves and helping with general cleaning.

"My volunteers are very dedicated. I can always depend on them," says Doris.



The garden incorporates raised planters to make gardening more accessible for seniors.

DID YOU KNOW...



Espalier

The garden has been experimenting with espalier, a horticulture technique of training woody plants, such as fruit trees, to grow horizontally along walls, trellises or wire fences. The branches are guided into shape by pulling and tying them down in the desired position. The difference between an espalier and a free-standing plant is that an espalier is two-dimensional (flat) and making it more manageable to maintain. In contrast, a

free-standing plant is three-dimensional, with branches and leaves that can grow in all directions and can become unwieldy.

The gardeners recognise that a plant is only as strong as the soil it grows in. From time to time, they enrich the earth with compost – lovingly made in the garden itself – to nourish the soil and enrich the growth of their espalier plants.

PLANT FEATURE



Remembering the Old Days

Visitors to the garden, including those who have experienced strokes or dementia, often recall memories from their kampung days," explains Doris.

"The Belimbing is particularly nostalgic for seniors. It's a fruit commonly used in curries or fried with *belacan*."



The gardeners make their own compost from browns such as dry leaves and greens such as vegetable scraps and fruit peels from the kitchen.



Plot-pourri of Cultures



The gardeners are assigned allotment plots, and given a free hand to plant whatever they like on their plots.

At the multi-storey car park at Block 167A Bishan Street 13 lies a rooftop community garden run by Bishan East Zone 6 RN (Residents' Network). From an aerial view, it looks like a field studded with emeralds. The "emeralds" are the allotment plots set up for residents who are interested in gardening activities.

While the concept of an allotment garden is not new, this garden boasts one of the largest numbers of allotment plots among the community gardens in Singapore today. This provides many nearby residents the opportunity to cultivate their own mini garden according to the set guidelines.



From the air, the rooftop garden looks like a field studded with emeralds.

A Blending of Cultures

Residents have planted a wide variety of herbs, vegetables and fruits, creating a rich diversity of colours, smells and textures in this space.

Every now and then they would organise a potluck. Each gardener will make a dish to share with the others. Most of the herbs and spices would come from the garden, including tea!

Shared Responsibilities

The Garden Leader, Sylvia Loh, and her committee comprising Gerard Lye, Cheryl Wong and Gina Tan lead and inspire the gardeners. They offer advice and assistance to the gardeners where needed. Gerard has the additional task of producing the compost for the whole garden.

How the Garden Started

In 2019, many residents expressed interest in having a community garden in the area. Some wanted to do gardening as a family but there was not enough space in the common corridor outside their flat. Others might have the corridor space but, depending on the orientation of their flat, may not have enough sunlight to grow certain plants.

So, the garden committee looked around for underutilised space they could turn into a community garden. They identified the rooftop of Blk 167A, applied for permission and got it.

The wide variety of plants and herbs in the garden reflects the different races and cultural backgrounds of our gardeners.

Sylvia Loh
Garden Leader





Power to the Gardeners

When planning the garden, the committee decided to try something different. For most other gardens, they are managed centrally – this includes the garden’s layout, choice of plants to grow, the use of decoratives as well as the scheduling of the gardeners’ duties.

However, in 167A, things are managed differently and individual gardeners are empowered. The garden was divided into smaller plots which were balloted to households on a 1+1 year lease plan.

Keeping Order

At the end of the first year, the plots are subject to a review. If a plot is under-worked, the gardener may be counselled. If the problem persists, they may be asked to return the plot to give other residents a chance at allotment gardening.

The gardeners are free to plant what they like based on the ground rules set for everyone. Apart from the basic rules of keeping their plots and surrounding clean and safe, they are discouraged from planting shrubs that are more than 1.2 m high. This is to maintain the aesthetics of the place and to prevent the garden from getting unkempt.

Preschools in the neighbourhood are given the opportunity to ballot for plots to engage the children through gardening activities.

The rooftop garden also contributes to the growth of other gardens, such as the Sky Garden at Bishan CC (Community Club). Several plots at the garden are designated for propagation of plants that may be transplanted to the Sky Garden.

The Process of Refinement

Over the years, the garden has flourished as the gardeners refine their skills and learn from one another. Committed gardeners with more time on their hands may choose to ballot for larger plots when their current lease period expires.

The garden is open to the public 24/7 to cater to gardeners who can work on their garden plots only in the late evenings or at night.

When my gardening friends know that I am busy and cannot come, they will tend to my plot for me and leave a note to say that he or she has already watered my plants for me.

Maria Stella Jeyabalan
Garden Volunteer

(From left)
Michelle Sai,
Pritika Reddy and
Maria Stella Jeyabalan.





The Citrus Garden

The committee started the Citrus Garden on the grass verge beside 167A in 2024. There are several kinds of citrus plants growing there including Kaffir Lime, Calamansi, Pomelo, Finger Lime and Lemon.

The committee wanted to create a garden to complement the one on the rooftop which is an allotment garden where residents could only grow plants and small trees. The Citrus Garden gives residents the chance to work with larger shrubs and trees.

The fruits ripen at different times, so they are harvested in small batches to be distributed to residents.



Spicing Things Up

Maria Stella Jeyabalan was among the first batch of residents allotted a plot in the garden. This is her third year running her plot. She says she loves it like her own child.

"When my gardening friends know that I am busy and cannot come, they will tend to my plot for me and leave a note to say that he or she has already watered my plants for me," says Stella.

Stella grows Red-stemmed Malabar Spinach (*Basella alba* 'Rubra') which is cooked with dal, and herbs and spices such as turmeric, ginger and curry leaves. She also has a Betel plant (*Piper betle*); the leaves of this species were often chewed by people in the past, a practice which started declining from the 1950s.

During Pongal, she supplies turmeric and ginger leaves for her Indian friends to tie around their rice-pudding pots for health and prosperity. She also supplies the betel leaves for them to decorate their fruit trays.

Stella shares her *Lemak Kang Kong* and *Sambal Kacang Botal* recipes (see opposite page).



From Fiji with Love

Pritika Reddy is an Indo-Fijian married to a Singaporean, and has been living in Singapore for 27 years now. She has had a passion for gardening since young, growing up in Fiji where her father owns a sugarcane plantation.

Many of the edible plants she grows on her plot are of the Fijian variety, including the Long Bean, Lady's Fingers, and Winter Melon.

"In Fiji, we make our masala differently from Singapore. Fijians do not use turmeric and red chilli. Instead, they use roasted raw rice and dahl to thicken the curry. That is why Fijian masala is more brown while Singapore-made masala has a stronger red colour," she says.

Pritika shares her signature Fried Long Beans recipe (see opposite page).

Recipes



Sambal Kacang Botal

By Maria Stella

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 6 small winged beans cut diagonally (300 g)
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce (optional)
- Water
- Cooking oil
- Salt to taste

Pounded/minced ingredients:

- 4 shallots
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 2 fresh red chilli
- 2 tablespoons dried shrimp soaked

Steps:

1. Heat oil.
2. Stir-fry pounded ingredients until golden brown.
3. Add beans and stir-fry for two minutes.
4. Mix in the oyster sauce and some water (avoid over dilution).
5. Cover the pan and cook until the beans are tender.
6. Add salt to taste.



Lemak Kang Kong

By Maria Stella

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 bunch of kang kong (approx 200–250 g)
- 100 ml coconut milk
- 1 medium onion
- 1 red chilli
- 2 cloves of garlic
- A pinch of turmeric powder
- Salt to taste

Steps:

1. Cut the onions, chilli, and garlic.
2. Stir-fry the cut ingredients until translucent.
3. Add turmeric powder.
4. Add coconut milk mixed with water (to desired thickness) and keep stirring to ensure smoothness.
5. Add kang kong and salt to taste.



Fried Long Beans

By Pritika V. Reddy

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 10 fresh long beans
- 1/2 onion
- 1 green chili
- 2–3 cloves of garlic
- 1 strand curry leaves
- 1 touch of curry paste
- 1 pinch of masala (for taste)
- 1 tomato
- Cooking oil
- Salt to taste

Steps:

1. Clean and chop beans.
2. Heat the oil in the cooking pan.
3. Add curry paste, chopped onions, garlic, chilli and cook to golden brown.
4. Add masala, long beans, tomatoes and salt to taste.
5. Let it cook for 8 to 10 minutes and serve with rice or roti.



Spanish Needles Flower Tea (*Bidens pilosa*)

By Michelle Sai

Serves 4–5

Ingredients:

- 1.5 L hot water
- 50 pieces Spanish Needles stem cuttings
- 2 tablespoons of rock sugar/brown sugar/honey
- 3 pieces of pandan leaves

Steps:

1. Pour 1.5 L hot water and 3 pieces of pandan leaves into the tea pot to boil for 10 minutes.
2. Add Spanish Needles and sugar to boil for another 5 minutes.





A Singapore Fantasyland

The first thing that catches the eye of visitors to the Punggol Coral RC's (Residents' Committee) Community Garden is the Merlion sprouting water in a pond. It is a close replica of the one standing on the banks of Marina Bay.

This piece was made by Garden Leader Lim Keng Tiong and his assistant leader Cheong Kwai Fong in 2022 as the country was going through the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Merlion is one of the icons that people around the world have come to associate with Singapore.



The shields represent five out of six tenets of Singapore's Total Defence.



Keng Tiong took the time during the COVID-19 pandemic to develop an orchid section for the garden.

While Keng Tiong engineered the structure using concrete, cement and meshed metal, Kwai Fong brought it to life with her detailed artistry, carefully sculpting every scale and bodily feature.

Beyond the Merlion, the garden unfolds as a miniature Singapore. Thoughtfully-placed installations – from satellite dishes to children's playgrounds, electric trees, and the shields representing different pillars of Singapore's Total Defence – transform this space into a captivating Singapore Fantasyland.

Forging an Identity

The garden was just an empty patch of ground with a few trees when it started out in 2007.

Two years later, Keng Tiong became the leader of the garden, and the pace of developing the garden increased as more people started to join as volunteers. As they came with ideas of their own, Keng Tiong realised that he needed to play the role of coordinator as well.

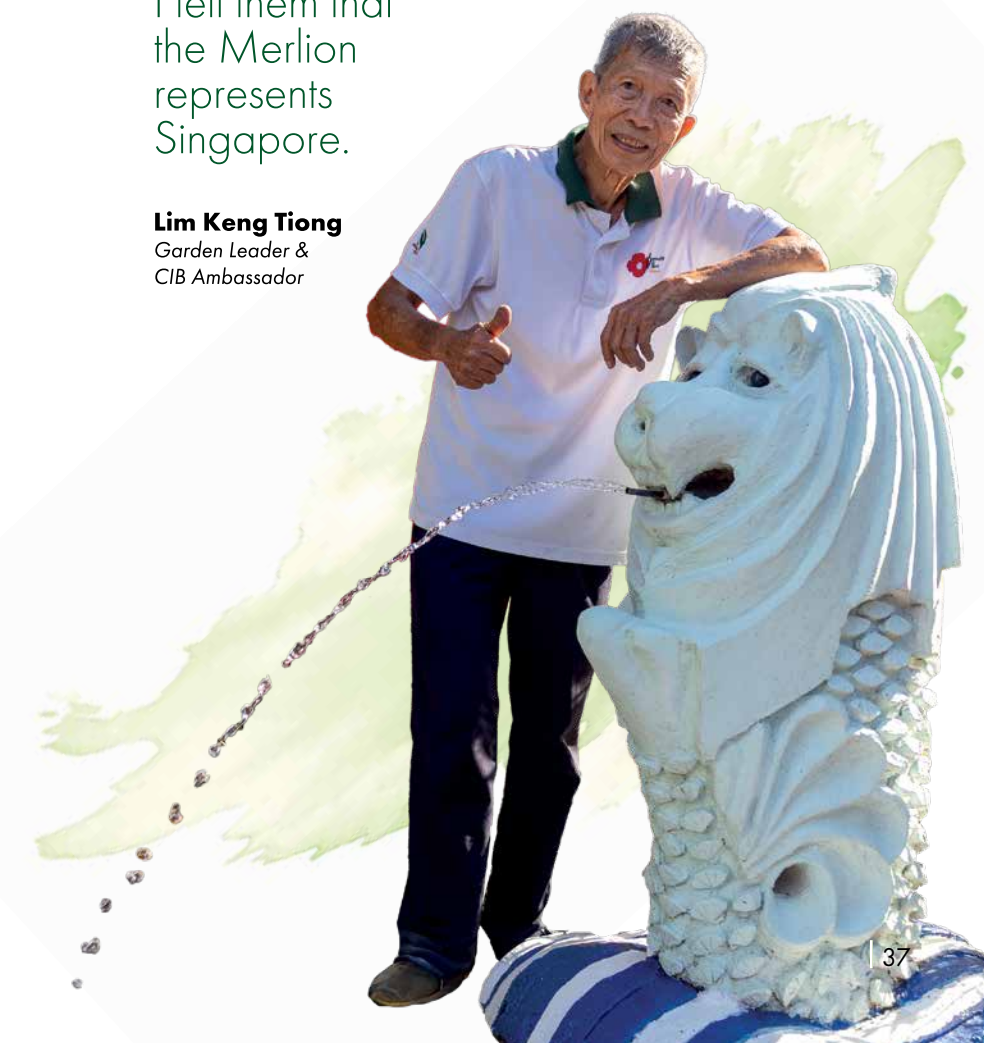
He started to map out various sections of the garden for the fruits, ornamentals and edibles.

When Kwai Fong joined in 2017, Keng Tiong tapped on her artistic talents to develop many of the installations seen in the garden today.

"When the children come to the garden, I tell them that the Merlion represents Singapore," says Keng Tiong.

When the children come to the garden, I tell them that the Merlion represents Singapore.

Lim Keng Tiong
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador





Just about anything can be upcycled – coconut husks, car tyres, and even detergent bottles.

The Volunteers

Meet two of the regular volunteers of the garden!



Siti Noya, who is a 78-year-old retiree, enjoys the company of other gardeners. She spends about three hours in the garden every day, helping to clean and tidy up the place.



Sangeetha Alagarsamy finds that gardening has therapeutic benefits for her father-in-law, who suffers from dementia.

A Milestone for Expansion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the gardening group made significant improvements, including the creation of the iconic Merlion and an orchid section. Accessibility was enhanced with wider footpaths to accommodate wheelchairs. Keng Tiong’s innovative touch is evident in the solar panels that power evening illumination of the art displays.

Coming Together to Celebrate

The gardening group used to have its Saturday Karaoke Nights on a fortnightly basis. About 20 residents, mostly seniors, would come down to sing and have fun. Occasionally, the garden group also used to invite hairdressers to come down to the garden to give the seniors a haircut.

Some of the gardeners would prepare red bean soup and other snacks. Sometimes they would make curry chicken, and the seniors would have it with rice or bread.

The gardening group also celebrates Mid-Autumn Festival, Father’s Day, Mother’s Day and other occasions such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya Puasa, National Day, Deepavali and Christmas.

Sometimes, Keng Tiong invites a friend to perform songs on the Chinese guzheng.

As the gardening group prepares to commemorate Singapore’s 60th anniversary, Keng Tiong and Kwai Fong are creating another Merlion display for the garden. It is surely a sign that the garden is still growing and improving.

Orchids and Air Plants

They bring cheer and add colour to the garden.



Orchids

Come and experience the sights, sounds and flavours of Singapore.



Solar Panels

Conserving energy and using clean energy is one way to build a healthier and more sustainable ecosystem.

The Children’s Playground

A children’s playground is built with upcycled and recycled material.



Outdoor Classroom

Rice

(*Oryza sativa*)
A clumping, annual grass that requires full sun and consistently wet to flooded, clay-rich soil. When the plant matures, the feathery-looking inflorescences gracefully arch over and sway easily in the wind, turning from green to golden-brown as the seeds ripen.

Pomelo

(*Citrus maxima*)
An evergreen tree with an open crown and spiny branches that can reach 15 m tall. The Pomelo fruit can reach up to 30 cm in diameter and is the largest of citrus fruits. It has a thick, spongy rind protecting the sweet juicy pulp within. The pulp is extracted, eaten fresh or used in desserts and drinks where it is popularly consumed in East and Southeast Asia. It thrives in full sun, well-draining soil and requires regular watering.

Fruits



The garden table is made from solid wood found near the garden.

Edibles



Layout of Punggol Coral RC’s Community Garden.

Ornamentals



Copper Leaf
(*Chrysothemis pulchella*)



Lotus
(*Nelumbo nucifera*)

Total Defence

Total Defence includes Military, Civil, Economic, Social, Digital, and Psychological Defence.



Passion Fruit

(*Passiflora edulis*)
A fast-growing climber that grows best in full sun and supported on trellises. Its ornamental purple flowers have frilly white filaments. The oval fruit turns from green and smooth to purple and wrinkled when ripe. The fruit’s fragrant and tart pulp can be eaten fresh and used in desserts and beverages.



Rooted in Friendship



The story of the Marine Crescent Ville RN's (Residents' Network) Community Garden began in 2005, when neighbourhood upgrading works presented the perfect opportunity for transformation. Gina Ong and neighbours from the Marine Crescent Ville RN envisioned creating a shared green space that would bring residents together.

A simple proposal to the Housing & Development Board quickly gained approval, and it was the collective effort that followed – the coming together of neighbours, the sharing of gardening knowledge, and the nurturing of both plants and relationships – that transformed this vision into reality. What emerged was not only an award-winning garden, but a living testament to the power of community, where friendships would take root and flourish alongside the plants they tenderly cultivated.



Growing Together Through Challenges

The early years tested the gardeners' resolve and ingenuity. Located near the sea, they faced unique challenges – poor soil quality and equipment that was affected by the salty breeze. Yet these obstacles became opportunities for the community to solve problems together. As the group of community gardeners grew, so did their collective knowledge and determination. "We have become like family," reflects Gina, as the gardeners support each other through trial and error, sharing both their harvest and life events.

A Garden that Reflects Its Community

Today, this thriving space is also known as "Our Kitchen Garden," celebrating the diverse culinary heritage of its gardeners. The impressive variety of herbs and spices from various cultures mirrors the multi-racial, multi-cultural character of the community that tends to it. Gardeners often exchange not just plants and growing tips, but also recipes and cooking techniques, adding another layer to their deepening friendships.

The garden continues to evolve, and in 2022, the community successfully secured support for an upgrade that brought improved facilities and structures, enhancing both the gardening experience and opportunities for social interaction. These new additions have created even more spaces for neighbours to gather, share knowledge and build bonds.



Some of the gardeners here have been together for 20 years since the garden was started.

Gina Ong
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador



The community came together to revamp Marine Crescent Ville RN's Community Garden.

Growing Community Connections

The garden has become more than just a space for its regular gardeners – it's now a living classroom where relationships continue to branch out into the wider community. Children from the nearby preschools and student care centre are frequent visitors, discovering the joys of nature through hands-on experiences. "Nowadays, children are losing touch with nature. When I hear parents telling their children 'Don't touch the soil, it's dirty!' I can see why. We have to educate the parents as well," Gina said.

This consistent spirit of sharing and excellence in gardening standards has earned the garden Diamond Awards in NParks' Community in Bloom Awards in both 2016 and 2022. But perhaps more meaningful than the accolades is how three of the garden's long-time members, Gina Ong, Rosita Cedillo and Sylvia Chua, have become ClB Ambassadors, extending their friendship and expertise beyond Our Kitchen Garden. Through talks and sharing sessions, they now help nurture other community gardeners, spreading the same seeds of fellowship that have flourished in their own garden.



Sharing the Harvest

What began as neighbours sharing their harvest has grown into meaningful community initiatives. The gardeners regularly propagate plants for various community events and share fresh vegetables with different senior care centres.

Every week, the gardeners rescue vegetables from a wholesale market that would otherwise go to waste. These slightly imperfect but still nutritious vegetables are carefully sorted and distributed to residents, turning potential waste into welcome gifts for the community.

In 2014, the garden's community spirit was recognised when it was chosen to host the World Food Day celebrations in Singapore, marked by a special harvest sharing with an eldercare centre – a fitting tribute to the garden's role in nurturing both plants and relationships.





Friendships that Last

Two decades on, many of the pioneer gardeners continue to tend to their plots together, their bonds deepening like the roots they nurture. These friendships have grown far beyond the garden beds – they celebrate birthdays and festivals with home-cooked meals featuring their harvest, while supporting each other through life's ups and downs, from health challenges to personal losses.

The garden's welcoming spirit draws people from all walks of life. "I work from home and need to come out to relax. I come here to water the plants and meet people," shares Steve Bai, a software engineer who found his place in the community garden. For Tess Dela Cruz, the garden created an unexpected connection when she met a fellow gardener from her home province in the Philippines.

What started as a simple neighbourhood initiative during upgrading works has blossomed into a thriving community where lasting friendships take root alongside the plants. At Marine Crescent Ville RN's Our Kitchen Garden, the garden does not just grow vegetables – it cultivates relationships that enrich lives and nourish the soul.



The garden has four wormeries, which produce part of the garden's fertiliser needs.



Composting is an essential part of gardening and includes vermicomposting and Bokashi composting.

Annatto (*Bixa orellana*)

A small, evergreen tree with triangular to heart-shaped leaves. It bears pink flowers and scarlet rambutan-like fruit. This tree thrives in full sun with regular watering. The red-orange pigment extracted from the seed is used as a dye in dairy and baked products, cosmetics and the pharmaceutical industries.



The Wormeries

The excrement and juices from worms make good fertiliser material.

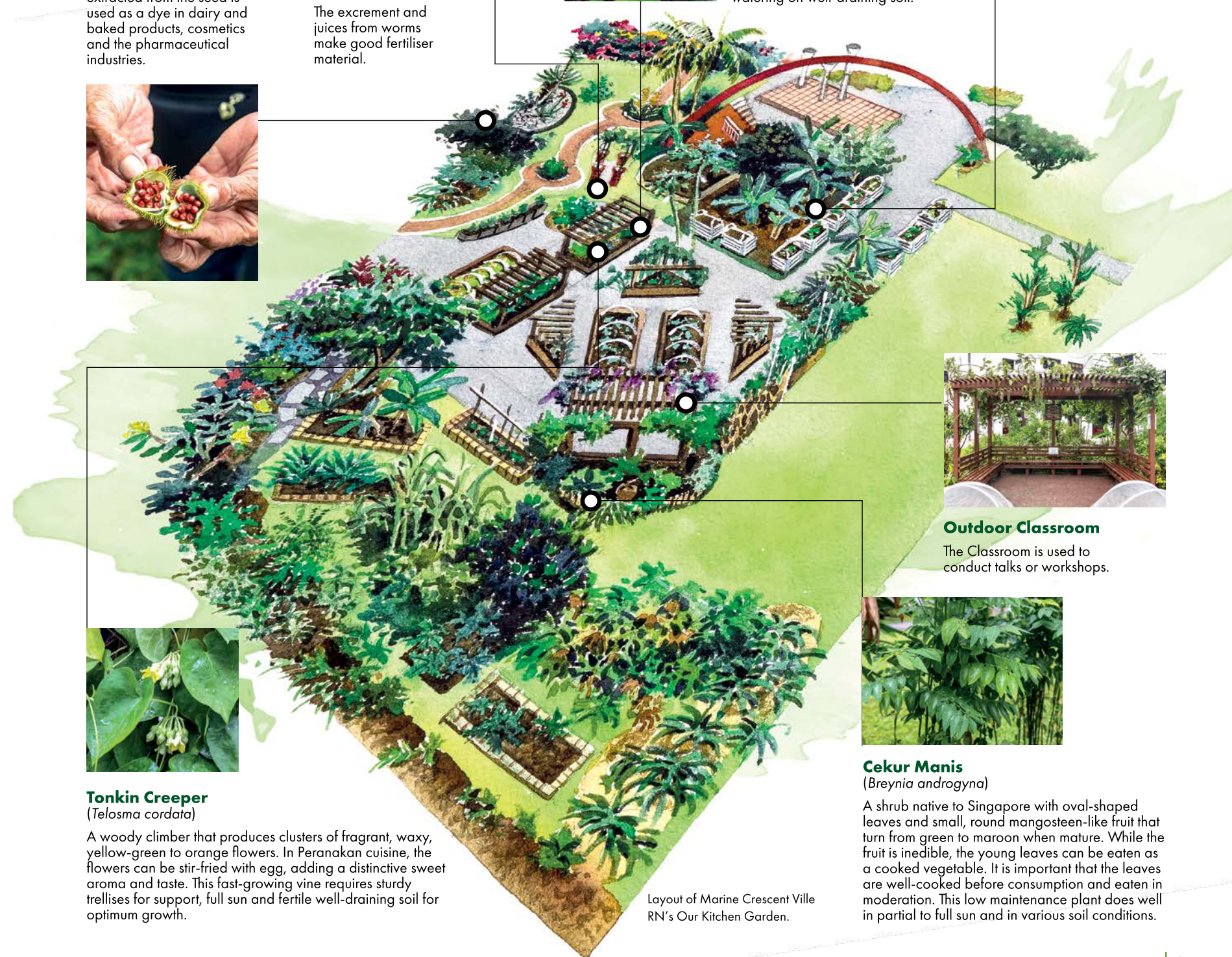


Dayak Onion (*Eleutherine bulbosa*)

An herbaceous plant with long linear leaves, red-brown underground bulbs and inflorescences of small, scented, white flowers. The juice from the bulbs is used in traditional medicine by the Dayak community in Borneo. The plant does best in partial shade with regular watering on well-draining soil.

Coffee Compost

Coffee grounds are used in composting because they are fragrant and do not give off a rotting odour.



Outdoor Classroom

The Classroom is used to conduct talks or workshops.



Cekur Manis (*Breynia androgyna*)

A shrub native to Singapore with oval-shaped leaves and small, round mangosteen-like fruit that turn from green to maroon when mature. While the fruit is inedible, the young leaves can be eaten as a cooked vegetable. It is important that the leaves are well-cooked before consumption and eaten in moderation. This low maintenance plant does well in partial to full sun and in various soil conditions.

Tonkin Creeper (*Telosma cordata*)

A woody climber that produces clusters of fragrant, waxy, yellow-green to orange flowers. In Peranakan cuisine, the flowers can be stir-fried with egg, adding a distinctive sweet aroma and taste. This fast-growing vine requires sturdy trellises for support, full sun and fertile well-draining soil for optimum growth.



Layout of Marine Crescent Ville RN's Our Kitchen Garden.



SOWING THE SEEDS OF COMMUNITY

Gardens that reach out to other communities to offer their time, talents and resources



Mastering the Art of Give and Take



The community garden in Kim Tian West, also known as The Giving Garden, embodies the spirit of give and take. It is fortunate to have a warm and supportive gardening community and bountiful harvests, and is happy to be in a position to give.

The spirit of give and take is exemplified by a pair of Chinese calligraphy sculptures donated to the garden by artist Chua Boon Kee. The sculptures consist of two words: "En" means "the grace of giving"; and "Hui" means "the blessing in receiving". Together, they poetically express the meeting of two boats in the vastness of the open sea, miraculously brought together by fate. When the benefactor and the beneficiary meet, gratitude is deeply felt.

If birthing new gardens is the measure of a garden's success, The Giving Garden would surely rank very highly. To date, its Garden Leader Felicia Tan has mentored at least eight organisations and helped them set up gardens of their own.

Although the work is time-consuming and requires a lot of patience because the results are not instantaneous, Felicia says she doesn't mind it because she finds it meaningful.

One such organisation, the Hainan Tan Clan Association, plans to set up a garden on its premises in Seah Street. Its board members will be coming to the garden for training over three months. They will be picking up gardening tips while working alongside The Giving Garden's gardeners. In the next phase, Felicia and her team will go over to help them set up their garden.

Felicia is assisted by gardeners: Goh Yao Xing, takes charge of social media and IT; Jason Tan, gardening; and Shutao Xu, the children's programmes.



I enjoy what I am doing and I am happy to help other organisations set up their gardens.

Felicia Tan
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador





Gardening Activities

Jason conducts workshops to teach small groups of gardening enthusiasts germinating and other gardening skills. He oversees the garden's germination section that contributes vegetable seedlings to all the planters.

He is currently working on the landscaping for a car ramp and hopes to expand the garden.

Jason remembers how he started out: "One of my first projects was to grow pumpkins. I used to see pumpkins growing very big in other gardens and thought it was easy to grow. After months of trying, the pumpkins I got were small – like passion fruits! I realised that there are many things we don't know..."



Networking and Cooperating

The gardeners within the same district tap on each other's experience so the new ones don't have to start from scratch. They also share best practices to shorten their learning curves and raise productivity.

The community gardens in Tiong Bahru divide out the work of serving the community: Kampong Tiong Bahru East RN (Residents' Network) and Tiong Bahru Community Centre produce mostly vegetables; Tanjong Pagar Spottiswoode Park RN produces ornamental plants and manages the vermicomposting efforts. The Giving Garden, being the most established, produces pumpkins plus other edible fruits and vegetables.

Judy Koh, BBM, the Chairman of the Kampong Tiong Bahru East RN, and her Garden Leader Teo Imm Toh have been coming to learn how to grow pumpkins. In their neighbourhood's renewal plan, there is a provision for a new garden, and they want to be ready to start a pumpkin patch when the plan is rolled out.

Irene Chia and her colleagues from the Kim Tian West RN contribute to the garden by collecting food waste, fruit skin and coffee powder from residents.

The Giving Garden also regularly collaborates with schools, such as the School of the Arts (SOTA) and Zhangde Primary School. The gardeners organise activities and nature appreciation sessions to support and enrich their school curriculum.



The Dancing Gardeners

Every Friday night, a dozen or so gardeners exchange their overalls for leotards, and garden spades for floral sashes to dance.

Led by teacher Shirley Zhang, they learn different styles of dance – Malay, Chinese, Indian, folk, hip-hop and even line dancing! The group has made a name for itself, and is often invited to perform at community events.

"Plants love music, so we play music and dance for them," says Shirley.

But the dancing gardeners spread their joy beyond the garden. Once a month, they go over to St Luke's Senior Care Centre in Telok Blangah and Fei Yue in Holland Village to perform for the seniors.



Children's Activities

Shutao, a new citizen hailing from China, brings his two young boys down to the garden on most Sundays. He says many people living in urban settings do not have gardens they can go to. So he organises activities for them around gardening and plants. Using adapted gardening tools for their small hands, he gets the children to work the ground. And for their effort, they get to bring some vegetables home.

Other than gardening, he tries to get the children to recognise and name the different vegetables, fruits and insects. And he tells his child how all this is part of Singapore's plan to feed the people.

"When my parents from China came down to visit, we spent much time here as a multi-generational family. And we made a lot of friends in this place. This garden is special to me," says Shutao.



After months of trying to grow pumpkins, they still came out small ... I realised that there are many things we still need to learn. And we are still learning.

Jason Tan
Garden Leader & CIB Ambassador



Youth Power

There is also an active group of youths who participate in the garden activities. They provide the muscles when there is heavy lifting to be done, which is appreciated by those who may be unable to do so.



(From left) Shervon Lee, Luo Yuhan, Smrithi Chandrasekar and Shannon Lee, Chairman of Kim Tian West RN.

“We have nets in some plots to protect the delicate plants from the sun and the elements. There was a time when we had too many plants to protect and not enough nets. We had to learn to prioritise and provide nets for the most vulnerable ones.”

– Luo Yuhan

“Some time last year, there was an infestation of snails in the garden plots. And we immediately got down to the task of saving our plants. It took a few weeks before we managed to get their numbers under control.”

– Smrithi Chandrasekar

Sharing Compost

The gardeners contribute food waste, which is converted to compost. In the spirit of giving, any excess is shared with other organisations that need it.



Recipe



Stir-fried Pumpkin Flowers

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 20 pumpkin flowers
- 2 tbsp cooking oil
- 1 tbsp fish sauce
- ½ tsp salt or to taste



Steps:

1. Cut the flowers.
2. Heat cooking oil in a pan.
3. Add the pumpkin flowers and stir lightly for 1–2 mins.
4. Season with fish sauce and salt.
5. Stir-fry for another 2–3mins until seasonings are dissolved.
6. (Optional) Make a dip of soy sauce and cut red chilli as an accompaniment.

Trang (left), a resident from Vietnam, shares a dish made with pumpkin flowers that is common in her country.



Malabar Spinach (*Basella alba*)

A vigorous vine that climbs up to 10 m on support structures. It has thick succulent, reddish-purple stems and distinctive glossy, heart-shaped dark green leaves that are cooked and consumed as vegetables. Its small pink or white flowers develop into ornamental purple berries. This sun-loving vine requires well-draining soil and moderate watering.



Korean Spring Onion (*Allium fistulosum* cultivar)

A variety of spring onion that grows in upright clumps reaching 60 cm tall. It stands out for its edible, robust and crunchy leaves. This herb can be harvested repeatedly through division as it continues to produce new shoots. This plant grows well in full sun with well-draining, fertile soil with regular watering.



Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*)

A perennial herbaceous plant with feathery, needle-like leaves that can reach 2 m tall and produces small, bell-shaped flowers. Its roots can develop into tender, edible young shoots. Asparagus is typically a temperate plant, preferring cool temperatures. However, it can adapt to Singapore's tropical climate if provided with well-draining soil, consistent water, regular fertiliser and shade from the intense afternoon sun.



Crookneck Squash (*Cucurbita pepo* cultivar)

A climber that can grow up to 90 cm in length. It has large leaves and edible, bright yellow fruit with a curved neck. This sun-loving plant requires rich well-draining soil and regular watering. Monitor for powdery mildew disease which can be prevalent in humid conditions.



Layout of The Giving Garden at Kim Tian West.



Supporting a Healthy and Sustainable Lifestyle



The Tempinis Tree which gave the town its name.

Our Tampines Hub (OTH) is Singapore's largest integrated community and lifestyle hub.

The OTH Eco-Community Garden is situated on the fifth level of OTH. The garden is designed to promote environmental awareness and community bonding. It features a diverse range of plants, flowers, and herbs, all cultivated with sustainable methods. A unique feature is the kilometre-long jogging track coursing through the fifth level that enables joggers to exercise while taking in the beauty of the garden.



The garden has a large variety of fruit trees, ornamental plants and vegetables, all grown without insecticides or other chemicals.



Smart and Sustainable

The Eco-Community Garden integrates with OTH's comprehensive sustainability framework. The Building and Construction Authority Green Mark (Platinum) certified facility features advanced environmental solutions including solar power, water management systems, green walls, natural ventilation, and food waste management.

Encouraging Biodiversity

The garden strategically incorporates flowers and fruit trees to attract insects such as butterflies and birds, enhancing natural pollination and crop yield. Through educational workshops, visitors can learn about ecosystem preservation and their role in environmental stewardship.



The air in this garden is clean and fresh because we don't use pesticides or any other chemicals. And there are no mosquitoes.

Lee Teck Chuan
Garden Volunteer



OTH Eco-Community Garden

The garden is managed by a team of volunteers who comes two to three times per week to help with the gardening tasks such as weeding, soil loosening and watering.

The garden has separate sections for vegetables, herbs, flowers and fruit trees, enhancing visitors' experience. It has more than 50 varieties of edible vegetables, all grown organically without chemical pesticides and fertilisers.

Once a month on harvest day, the volunteers will arrive early at 7 am to harvest and pack the vegetables into packets of 400 g. These will be distributed to residents in the area. About 100 households benefit from each harvest.

Everyone in the queue will be given a packet of vegetables together with a packet of hub-produced organic fertiliser – to encourage residents to take up gardening themselves. That is how Eco-Community Garden benefits the local community.

The garden features historically significant species like the Tempinis Tree (*Streblus elongata*), and interesting plants such as the Miracle Fruit (*Synsepalum dulcificum*), known for its taste-altering properties.

The garden's reputation for biodiversity has made it a popular destination for international visitors, including transit passengers from Changi Airport.



The people here are nice.
This garden reminds me of
my old kampong in Penang.

Kho Hoay Sim
Garden Volunteer



I saw two birds
nesting in the
starfruit tree.
That's a good
sign. It means
that they feel
safe in our
garden.

Siti Maimunah Bte Jamil
Garden Volunteer



The Wormery

The garden maintains an efficient organic waste management system around its Wormery, which houses multiple bins of worms. These worms process food scraps collected from OTH's operations, converting them into fertiliser. The worm castings are combined with decomposed food waste and dried leaves to create nutrient-rich compost. This natural fertiliser production is supplemented by two Eco-Digesters, which handle larger volumes of organic waste and provide most of OTH's composting needs. Together, these systems form a closed-loop sustainability model for the facility's organic waste management.



SPOTLIGHT

Eco-Digester Centre



OTH houses two Eco-Digester machines that form the core of its waste management system. These on-site processors convert food waste into three useful by-products, which are then channelled back into the Hub's operations. This closed-loop approach demonstrates OTH's practical commitment to reducing waste and promoting sustainability within the building.



Food Waste Management Programme

Food vendors across OTH – including the supermarket, hawker centre, and F&B outlets – carefully separate their food waste at source. This waste is then processed daily at the Eco-Digester Centre, where it undergoes conversion into useful by-products. One key output is organic fertiliser, which nourishes plants in OTH's Eco-Community Garden and landscape. The Hub shares this fertiliser with residents during harvest days and community events, extending the benefits of its waste management programme to the wider community.

Other benefits of this food-waste management include:

- Reduction of landfill volume
- Fewer trips required for waste disposal, resulting in reduced gas emission
- Reduced haulage charges
- Minimising of smell and pest issues from food-waste exposure at OTH



Cultivating Tomorrow's Stewards

The Geylang East Grove Community Garden draws visitors in with its abundant variety of plants. Ground-level beds, vertical displays and hanging installations create layers of greenery at every turn. This vibrant green space began with Chang Wei Shan, a resident whose international travels as a flight attendant inspired her vision. "I saw so many beautiful community gardens on my travels, especially in Europe, and I thought why can't we do something like this in Singapore," says Wei Shan.

With careful planning and collaboration with fellow resident Toh Mei Xuan and other neighbours, this vision took root. Today, under Mei Xuan and Wei Shan's leadership and supported by a dedicated team including Daniel Yu, Uncle Henry, and Berd Wong, the garden has flourished into a community hub with regular volunteers sharing their knowledge and passion with visitors of all ages.

I met a lot of interesting people in the garden. After getting to know them, I've become friends with some of them.

Toh Mei Xuan
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador



A community garden is not just about growing plants, it is also about building friendships and camaraderie. There's plenty of room to apply creative minds and open hearts to serve our neighbours.

Chang Wei Shan
Garden Leader



A Space for Stories

The garden's thoughtful design features 14 allotment plots. While the gardeners tend to their plot independently, creating their own unique spaces, there is still a harmonious atmosphere that ties the community garden together.

For Mei Xuan, the garden's greatest reward lies in the connections it creates. "It is heartwarming when people come by and tell me their stories," she shares. These stories span generations and experiences. One resident confided that despite living in the area for many years, she found friendship only after joining the garden community. Another resident shared memories of her family's farm where they grew all their vegetables, revealing forgotten food wisdom, like how the leaves of the Long Bean plant were eaten in addition to the beans.



The children using scrap material to make collage art. Behind them is the fish tank that was made from salvaged materials.



The garden organises gardening workshops where children learn to be creative and resourceful.



The children painted these colourful designs on the sides of the planter.



Nurturing Young Minds

The garden serves as a living laboratory where creativity and sustainability meet. At its entrance, a large fish tank demonstrates the gardeners' ingenuity. It was built mostly from salvaged materials, from its glass panels to its retaining bricks. Throughout the garden, display shelves, pot stands, trellises, and hanging bars tell similar stories of transformation: window grilles turned into plant supports, and a baby's cot finds new life as a plant rack.

This spirit extends to the children's corner, Mei Xuan's favourite space, where children from the nearby preschool gather each week to explore and learn. "Children are fascinated by nature. They are eager to see things grow," shares Mei Xuan. Through hands-on sessions, the children learn about plants, their life cycles, pollination, composting and so on. The learning goes beyond the garden, developing values like sharing, environmental stewardship, and responsibility. The children's paintings on the planters give a creative touch and sense of ownership to this special space.



Bambusa vulgaris 'Wamin'



Passiflora quadrangularis



Cyrtosperma johnstonii

A Garden That Grows With its Community

What began as a simple community garden has evolved into something more meaningful. Through its innovative features and diverse plant collection, the Geylang East Grove Community Garden continues to inspire curiosity and environmental consciousness in new generations. Here, children do not just learn about nature; they experience it firsthand, developing a deep appreciation for sustainability, biodiversity, and community that will grow with them into the future.

Musa acuminata 'Blue Java' (Variegated form)



Philodendron cultivar



The seeds of a variegated Banana.



Learning from Nature

The garden is an outdoor classroom in many ways. A simple but ingenious water harvesting system demonstrates sustainable practices: rainwater runs down the angled zinc roof of the garden shed into repurposed air-conditioning trunking, collecting in a sealed barrel for watering plants. It is a practical lesson in resource conservation.

The garden's assortment of unusual plants provides endless opportunities for discovery. Visitors encounter the remarkable range in plant diversity through specimens like the bulbous-stemmed Bamboo and uncommon Hibiscus varieties. Daniel, one of the dedicated gardeners, maintains an impressive collection of variegated plants, including seven different philodendron species. His prized *Philodendron patriciae*, with its uniquely lobed leaves and variegation stands in striking contrast to other Philodendron plants, a perfect example of the rich plant diversity.

Philodendron patriciae, Daniel's favourite plant.





A Healing That Comes From Nature



At Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH)'s Tower C seventh floor sits a tranquil rooftop garden. This community garden, lovingly tended by a dedicated team of hospital staff and residents from the neighbouring blocks, produces an array of fresh local vegetables and herbs that make their way directly to the hospital's kitchen.



Garden to plate: Much of the greens go towards preparing the meals for the hospital patients.



The roots of KTPH's community garden can be traced back to 2001, when occupational therapist Rosalind and butterfly expert Simon established an award-winning butterfly garden at Alexandra Hospital. Their partnership continued when Rosalind moved to KTPH in 2010, where management immediately recognised her potential to develop a rooftop garden. Simon subsequently joined the project, strengthening their collaboration.

Unlike the ground-level garden at Alexandra Hospital, they faced the unique challenge of developing KTPH's vast rooftop space, spanning the equivalent of 18 basketball courts. They envisioned transforming the space into both a productive edible garden and a sanctuary for staff and residents. With architectural guidance from Rosalind's husband, they transformed the rooftop into a vibrant community garden. Although Rosalind has since retired from KTPH, she still volunteers there regularly while Simon oversees the gardening group.

The garden today has developed into two sections overseen by long-time volunteers Low Lum Soon and Lim Ah Sien. There are also about 25 volunteer gardeners helping out on a regular basis.

A variety of plants are grown in the garden's two sections. Many fruit species can be found along the perimeter plots. The less common species include the Nutmeg, Pulasan, Breadfruit and Strawberry. There are flowering plants as well to attract the pollinators.



We wanted to utilise this empty rooftop space and make full use of the abundant sunlight to produce fresh organic vegetables for our patients.

Rosalind Tan
Retired Occupational
Therapist & CIB Ambassador

Making strings from the fibrous stem of Banana.



Garden to Table

A large portion of the garden is dedicated to planting leafy vegetables like Kai Lan, Cai Xin, and Xiao Bai Cai. Some of the vegetables are given to the gardeners and some sold at the farmers' market. But the bulk of the produce goes to preparing the patients' meals.

There are over 50 different species, varieties and cultivars of edible plants grown in the rooftop garden. The gardeners practice crop rotation as part of their integrated pest management approach, while maintaining soil quality.

"From their wards, the patients have a view of this beautiful garden. Seeing the gardeners tending to the vegetables, they will know that what they see on their plates come fresh from the garden," says Rosalind.

Volunteers manning the stall of their twice-weekly farmers' market.



Sustainable Methods

This garden exemplifies sustainable practices through its pesticide-free cultivation and diverse eco-friendly methods.

At its core, the garden relies on organic fertilisers rather than chemical alternatives. Their waste management system efficiently transforms vegetable trimmings from the hospital kitchen, fallen leaves from gardens, and coffee grounds from the coffeeshop into nutrient-rich compost. Fallen fruit and kitchen waste are converted into fruit enzyme, while fish pond water is used for irrigation. Some innovative solutions to reducing waste include processing banana stems into strings and repurposing discarded hospital pillowcases into horticultural waste bags.

These comprehensive practices reflect the gardeners' dedication to environmental stewardship.

Community Outreach

Twice a week, the garden organises a farmers' market at the atrium. Besides popular vegetables, the garden also puts out some of the fruit whenever they are available. Most of the produce is sold within half an hour. Former patients living nearby often return specifically to purchase the vegetables. The vegetables are also popular with hospital staff and visitors. Ornamental plants propagated in the garden are also sold at the farmers' market.

The garden also hosts groups of school children who come to learn about gardening and plants. The volunteers take the opportunity to teach them to appreciate nature and follow a sustainable lifestyle.

Preparing the seeds for the plant nursery.



Mung Bean (*Vigna radiata*)

A fast-growing bushy herbaceous plant with dark green compound leaves and yellow flowers that develop into slender pods. When the pods turn black, the mung beans inside are ready to harvest. This plant thrives in full sun and well-draining soil. It is an effective green manure crop as it can fix nitrogen for soil improvement!



Butternut Squash (*Cucurbita moschata* cultivar)

A vigorous climbing vine that can reach 5 m in length of trellises and support structures. It has distinct large lobed leaves, yellow trumpet-shaped flowers with bell-shaped fruit that turn pale orange when ripe. This plant requires full sun and regular watering in well-draining soil with organic matter.

Over 100 different varieties of fruits and leafy edibles are grown in the garden.



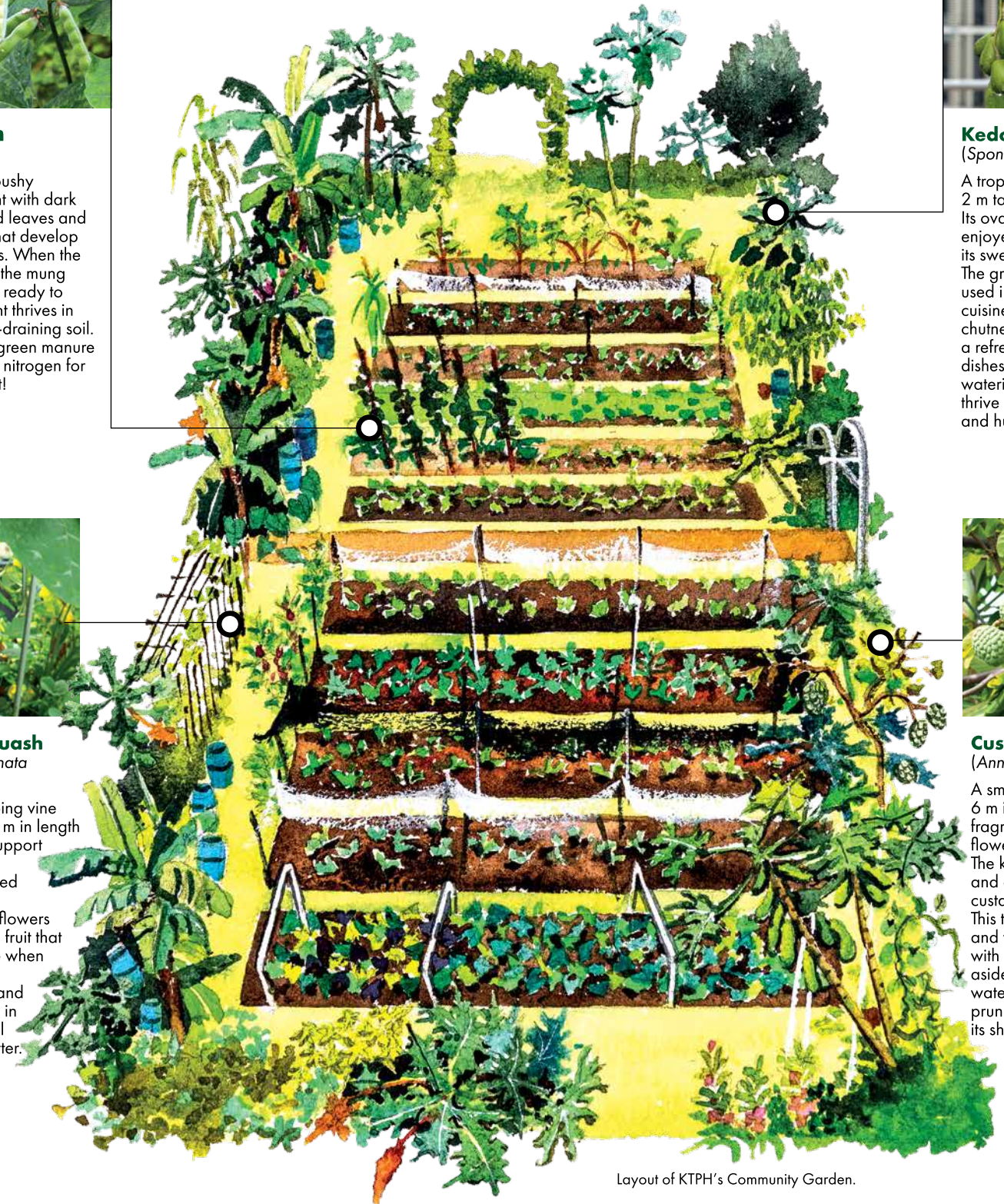
Kedondong (*Spondias dulcis*)

A tropical tree that is about 2 m tall in local gardens. Its oval, green fruit can be enjoyed raw when ripe for its sweet and tart taste. The green, unripe fruit is used in Southeast Asian cuisine for salads, pickles, chutneys and juices, adding a refreshing acidity to dishes. It prefers regular watering, and mature trees thrive in Singapore's warm and humid weather.



Custard Apple (*Annona squamosa*)

A small tree that can reach 6 m in height. It produces fragrant, pale-yellow flowers that hang down. The knobby fruit has sweet and creamy white pulp of custard-like consistency. This tree thrives in full sun and well-draining soil with minimal maintenance aside from regular watering and occasional pruning to maintain its shape.



Layout of KTPH's Community Garden.



Improving the Yield with Innovation



Lakeside Grove NC's (Neighbourhood Committee) Community Garden, nestled in an open space within a private housing estate, is a welcome sight to passers-by. This oasis of fruit trees and colourful plants is bound on three sides by semi-detached houses, which are the homes of many of the gardeners.

While this garden has been there for a long time, it was previously just a pond with a collection of plants. When the resident who was caring for it moved out, the place was abandoned, becoming overgrown with weeds.

It was at that point that another resident, Kelvin Tan, whose back gate opened into the garden, decided to do something about it.

"I spoke to two of my neighbours, Lee Lim Sim and Sim Chor Meng, and asked them if they were prepared to join forces with me to develop the garden, and they agreed. That's how we got started," says Kelvin.



Nick Ng (left) and Chandra Vallyan (right), both long-time residents, recall the old kampong spirit when residents used to gather at the garden to celebrate Mid-Autumn festival and have their regular "Relax-lah" evenings that included karaoke, party games and a hearty potluck.

Garden Transformation

Kelvin started to convert the pond into a Lily pond. Later he added some flowering plants and fruit-bearing ones. One by one, he added other items, such as a water feature and a garden swing, creating the garden we see today.

The garden also has two koi ponds. The wooden platform at the bigger koi pond was built by Kelvin from scratch many years ago. It remains in very good condition as Kelvin had made it from solid wood and used stainless steel screws to hold the wood together instead of iron nails that tend to rust.

Kelvin and the gardeners started to grow vegetables and experimented with different ways to improve the yield. They tried hydroponics, aquaponics and rain shelters to improve growth conditions – now their harvests are larger and more lush. Their Lettuce, Cai Xin, Spinach and Kai Lan take up to 21 days to be fully grown.

I like to try new things and different methods to improve our yield. So far, we've tried, hydroponics, aquaponics and rain shelters.

Kelvin Tan
Garden Leader

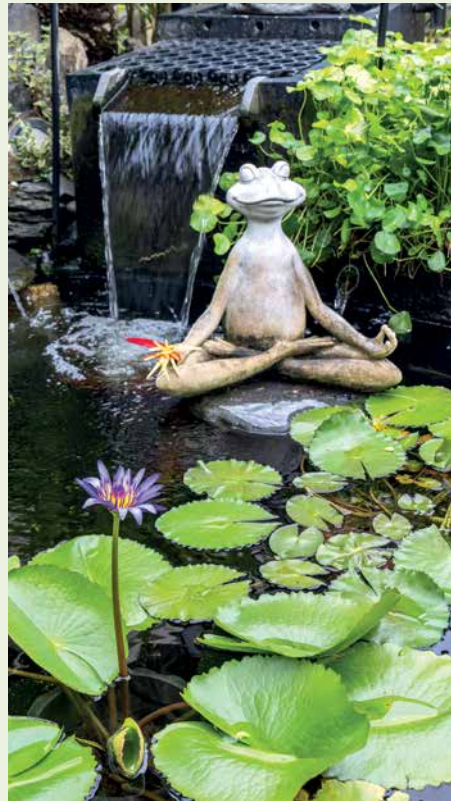




As the vegetables grow to full size, there is great anticipation among the gardeners, knowing they will get to the fruits of their labour.

When harvest time comes around, an announcement will be made on the residents' chat, and the gardeners will come and collect their lot. If there is an exceptionally bountiful harvest, the excess produce will also be shared with the other residents.

SPOTLIGHT



Aquaponics & Hydroponics

Aquaponics, like hydroponics, is a soilless method of growing plants using only water. The only difference is that hydroponics uses plain water with added nutrients, while aquaponics uses the natural nutrients of the water from fish tanks.

Kelvin constructed this 3-tier aquaponic set-up next to the koi pond. A pump pushes water from the pond to the highest tray, which spills into the second tray and down to the third. The water from the third tray then flows back into the koi pond. With this set-up in place, the pond water is continuously circulating through the aquaponics system.

Kelvin places his vegetable seedlings in the top two trays, and uses the lowest tray to grow Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle verticillata*) plants.



Rain Shelter

Kelvin built rain shelters to protect his vegetable seedlings, which tend to be particularly delicate, against the harsh elements. Each rain shelter is made up of a frame of PVC pipes and plastic sheets lined with netting. Together, the shelter shields his edible seedlings from heavy rain and strong sunlight.



Indian Laurel Fig (*Ficus microcarpa* 'Golden')

A compact evergreen shrub or tree with glossy, oval-shaped leaves which emerge yellow or golden before maturing to dark green, creating an attractive two-toned effect. This hardy plant thrives in full-sun to partial shade. It can be grown as a hedge, an ornamental specimen or artfully trained into bonsai form.



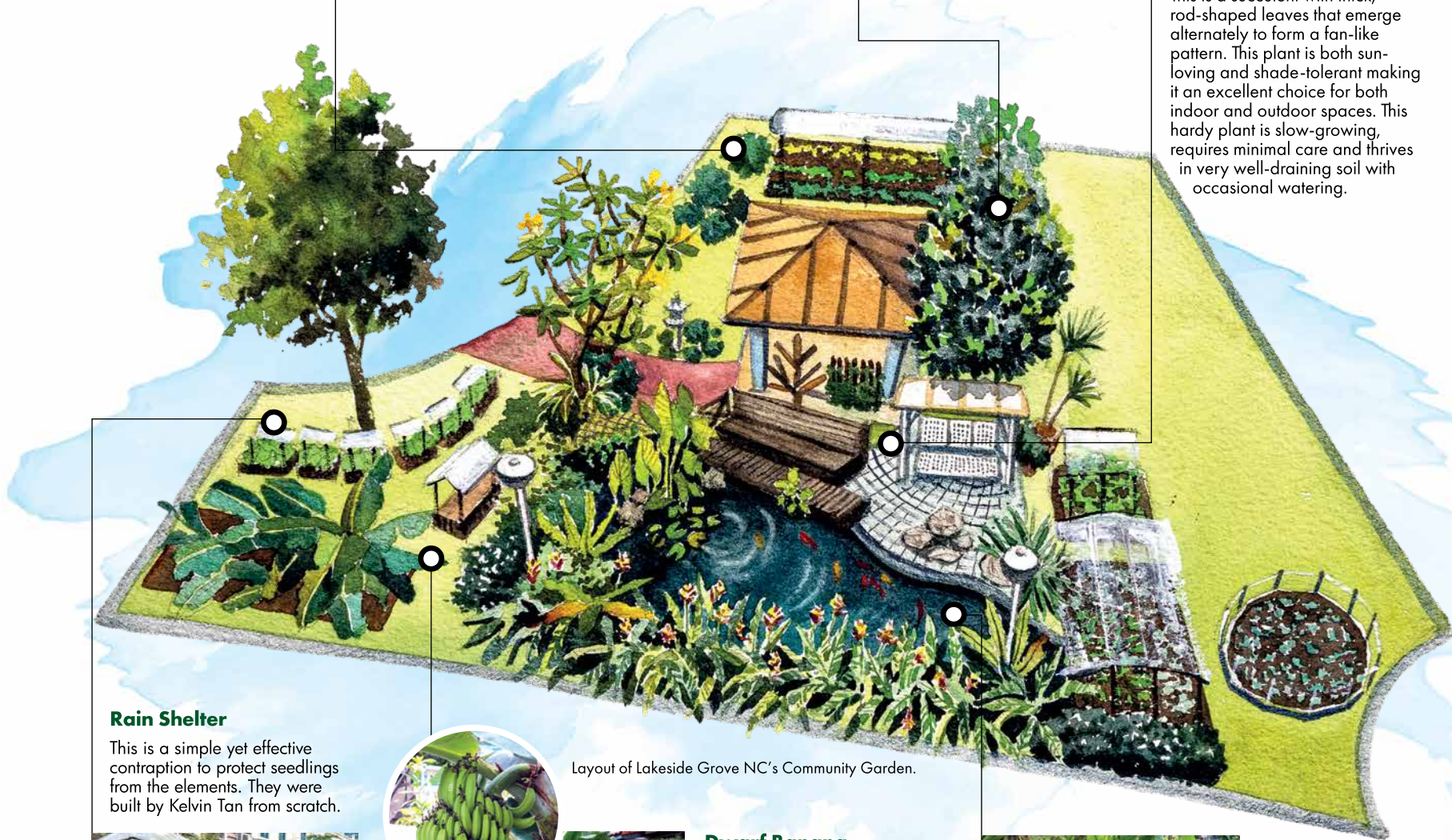
Jambur Air (*Syzygium aqueum*)

This tree can grow to 8 m in cultivation. It produces off-white to pale yellow flowers with multiple stamens giving it a pom-pom like appearance. Its pink to red, bell-shaped fruit can be eaten fresh and has crisp and airy flesh with a subtle rose fragrance. This sun-loving tree prefers fertile, well-draining soil.



Cylindrical Snake Plant (*Dracaena angolensis*)

This is a succulent with thick, rod-shaped leaves that emerge alternately to form a fan-like pattern. This plant is both sun-loving and shade-tolerant making it an excellent choice for both indoor and outdoor spaces. This hardy plant is slow-growing, requires minimal care and thrives in very well-draining soil with occasional watering.



Rain Shelter

This is a simple yet effective contraption to protect seedlings from the elements. They were built by Kelvin Tan from scratch.



Layout of Lakeside Grove NC's Community Garden.



Dwarf Banana (*Musa cultivar*)

This herbaceous plant is small, only growing to heights of 2 m, much unlike most other species of Banana trees. It produces large bunches of fruit that are easily accessed and harvested. It grows best in 6 to 8 hours of sunlight on fertile, well-draining soil.



Fish Pond

The two fish ponds, whose waters are circulated through the aquaponics system to provide water and nutrients for the plants, receive nutrients from the fish excrement.



Being at One with Nature

The Eco Stewardship Programme aims to cultivate a generation of eco-conscious students who will carry what they learned in school into their working life and beyond.



The Secondary Forest is the settings for some of the Biology, Geography and Physics classes.

In 2021, MOE introduced the Eco Stewardship Programme focusing on integrating environmental sustainability education into schools across the “4Cs” – Curriculum, Campus, Culture and Community. The aim was to cultivate a generation of eco-conscious students who will carry what they learned in school into their working lives and beyond.

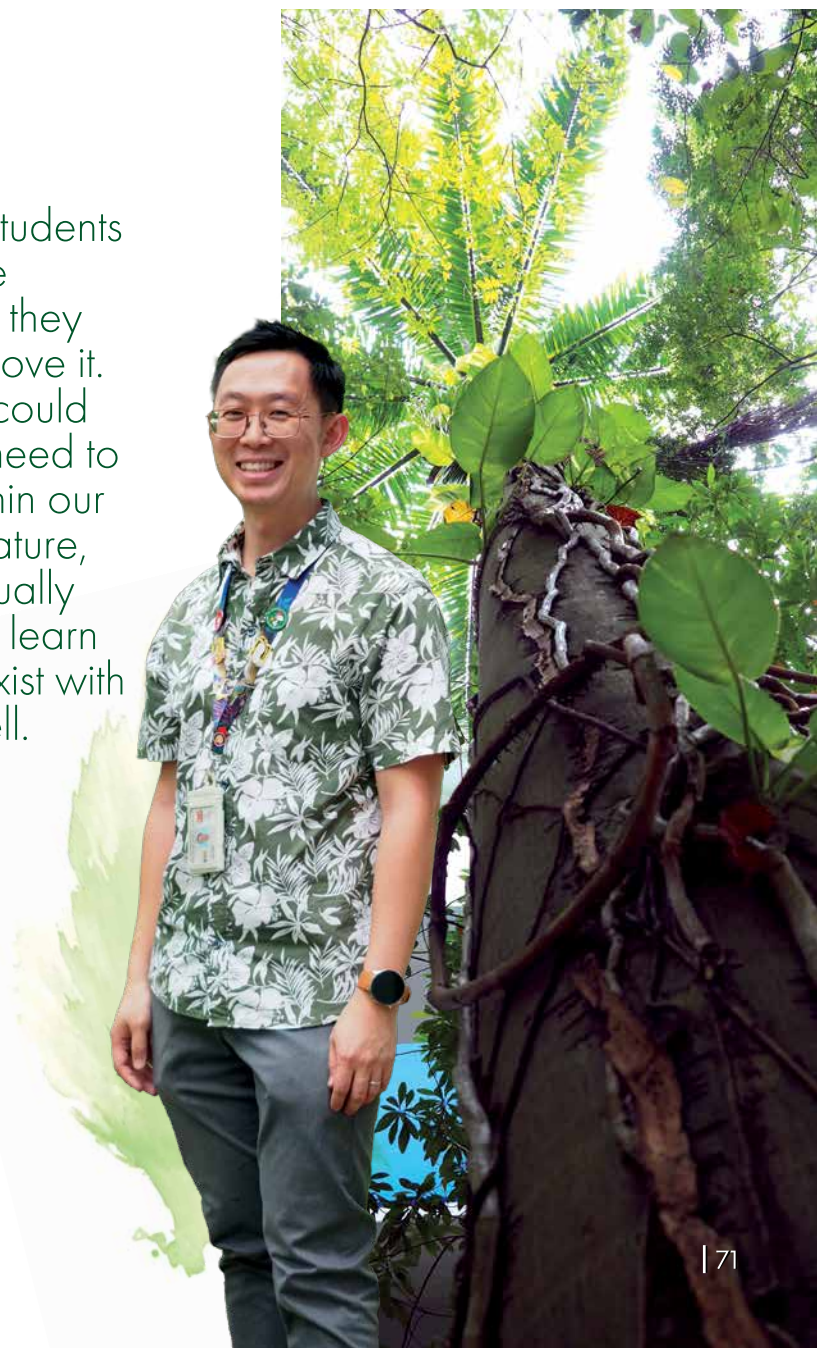
Commonwealth Secondary School was one of four schools to pilot this programme. The other three being Tampines Secondary School, Mee Toh School and Elias Park Primary School. It was hoped that they would pave the way for more schools to adopt the programme.

Right from the planning stage, it was decided that the school would develop the complete ecosystem, and not just piecemeal projects. In other words, the Rainforest Garden, the Wetlands and the other green spaces would be fully integrated to be a microcosm of Singapore, where students would experience national goals like 30 by 30, OneMillionTrees movement, City in Nature vision, and the SG Green Plan all in a school’s context.

To support the project, the school has over the years installed 1,744 pieces of solar panels on all their roof areas. Today, these solar panels meet 95% of the school’s annual electricity consumption.

In order for students to protect the environment, they first need to love it. Before they could love it, they need to know it. Within our School in Nature, they can actually observe and learn how to co-exist with nature as well.

Jacob Tan
Senior Teacher (Biology)



Observing from the different levels of the classroom block, the students are able to study the various layers of a rainforest – the forest floor, understorey, canopy and emergent layers.



Eco-Sustainability Education for All Students

The school’s Eco Club is run by three teachers – Jacob Tan, a Senior Teacher of Biology, Lye Zhen Xi, a teacher of Geography and Vineeta, a teacher of Food and Nutrition. The club has about 40 students.

All its Secondary One students have a module of Outdoor Farming integrated into their science curriculum, and when they move on to Secondary Two, there is an Indoor Farming module built in. So, every student who passes through the school would have had solid grounding on the subject of eco-sustainability.



Issues of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of life, such as animals and plants, found in an area. The eco-habitats in the school were constructed 10 years ago to support nature-based education, as the school saw the importance of bringing nature into the school as a daily experience rather than bringing students to nature once a year. These efforts have seen a good measure of success, having attracted some uncommon species of birds such as the Black Bittern (*Botaurus flavicollis*).

The school has implemented various measures to ensure a harmonious co-existence with wildlife. For instance, following an incident of a bird crashing into a glass window and becoming disoriented, the school has adapted and pasted non-reflective stickers on its clear glass windows to protect their unsuspecting winged friends.

Other birds that have visited the school’s green spaces include the Nightjar, Pink-necked Green Pigeon, Jambu Dove, White-throated Kingfisher and sunbirds.

Besides birds, the area has attracted other animals such as frogs, monitor lizards and snakes, including a wolf snake which was found inside one of the school’s vending machines. There are also insectivorous bats, which help to regulate the mosquito population.

The school has a biodiversity wall where all the bird and animal species that visited the school are documented, together with their pictures to form a food web of the school’s ecosystem.



White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

Water Recycling System

Rainwater is channeled down the pipes towards the bioswale in the middle of the Rainforest, and the water swells up as it channels towards the underground rainwater storage tank into a swale (a brook) that carries it through the Rainforest Garden. The water from the underground tank is also used to irrigate the rainforest during dry season or regulate the water level of the Wetland.

The Rainforest Garden plot is situated between two classroom blocks. That makes it convenient for students to observe the different layers of the rainforest from the different levels of the buildings; the layers being the forest floor, understorey, canopy and emergent layers.



The school has artificially created various habitats, including secondary forest, wetlands and other green spaces within its campus.



The controlled environment of the greenhouse allows students to cultivate plants under varying conditions, including soil, nutrition and lighting, and even compare hydroponics with conventional farming.

Understanding Food Sustainability

The students also learn about issues connected to food sustainability, which is the practice of producing food in a way that protects the environment, conserves resources, and improves the quality of life for people and animals.

They compare various types of farming – conventional farming, outdoor hydroponics under natural sunlight, and indoor hydroponics using controllable artificial light. They are taught to understand the trade-offs: for example, artificial light is convenient and effective, but it comes with electricity costs. Through these discussions, students learn about the pros and cons of different types of farming, and how to evaluate yields against costs when deciding on a farming method to be used.

Nursery to Propagate Endangered Plants

The school also has a plant nursery where they propagate endangered species such as the *Sophora tomentosa*, also known as the Silverbush, which are critically endangered in Singapore. They do so by using seeds collected by NParks' Native Plant Centre in 2020.

They are also propagating the Seashore Ardisia (*Ardisia elliptica*), a useful plant which attracts bees and butterflies such as the Malayan Plum Judy (*Abisara saturata*) and the Dark Malayan Sixline Blue (*Nacaduba calauria malayica*).

All the compost they need are produced by the six Food Digester machines in the school. These machines take in the food waste from several canteen vendors and turn them into all-natural organic compost.

Sprinkler heads positioned all over the nursery provides gentle misting that seedlings require in the early stages of growth.



The nursery propagates critically endangered plant species such as the *Sophora tomentosa*.



Outreach Effort

Commonwealth Secondary School gives walking tours to various groups of people including preschool children, residents from the area, as well as students and teachers from other schools who come to learn from the school's experience.

Recreating the Wetlands

Wetlands are areas where water covers the soil. They often act as floodplains, absorbing and holding back water to prevent downstream flooding. Forests, with its layers of canopy, also intercept rain and slow down the rate of surface runoff, thereby reducing flooding events.

Applying these same principles, the school created a rainwater harvesting system that comprises a Wetlands section (created from what used to be a concrete pond), and a Rainforest section. The plants in the Wetlands and Rainforest intercept and absorb water from the roof during heavy rain, slowing down surface runoff and thus reducing the chance of flash floods in the canals outside the school.



The ponds are designed in a way that water flows through them from higher to lower ground. From the lowest point, the water is pumped back to the first pond to be circulated.



SHOWCASING BEAUTY AND CREATIVITY

Gardens that showcase creativity
and innovation



A Love for Growing Orchids

The balcony on the rooftop of West Coast CC (Community Centre) has a garden with a stunning collection of orchids – over 50 hybrids from five or six species.

The space was originally a herbal garden but Elsie Chua, the Garden Leader, felt that herbs would grow better on the ground and that the balcony area was more suited for potted plants such as orchids. So in 2017, with the help of a group of orchid enthusiasts, she established the garden which is known today as the Let's Grow Orchid Garden at West Coast CC.

Orchids for Ordinary Folk

Singaporeans might love gardening, but not many choose to grow orchids at home, perhaps due to the belief that they are expensive and difficult to care for.

Elsie and her team are on a mission to change all that. They want to promote orchids to the masses, and show people how easy it is to grow them once they understand the basics of how to do so.

One way they demystify orchids is to use their common names when talking to people instead of the scientific names. Thus, *Dendrobium crumenatum* is referred to as Pigeon Orchid while the *Phalaenopsis* is simply called the Moth Orchid.



The Let's Grow Orchid Garden at West Coast CC has a comprehensive orchid collection.



The Vanda Miss Joaquim

Promoting Our National Flower

While some might think that the Vanda Miss Joaquim, our National Flower, can only be seen on television screens, it can actually be found along our roads and in our green spaces.

Today, the Let's Grow Orchid Garden at West Coast CC continues to play an important role in promoting orchids, which hold deep cultural significance in Singapore and a special place in the hearts of Singaporeans. The gardeners share their love for our National Flower by cutting and repotting them for neighbouring schools, community gardens, nursing homes and local residents.

The garden features a string of notable orchids including *Aranthera* Anne Black, named in 1956 after Lady Anne Black, wife of the former Governor of Singapore, Sir Robert Black. Another is the *Papilionanda* Tan Chay Yan, a hybrid created by Tan Hoon Siang, son of Tan Chay Yan. It was awarded a First Class Certificate at the Chelsea Flower Show in 1954.

However, the garden does not only focus on growing famous orchids. Instead, it promotes those that are historically significant, such as bamboo orchids, which once grew freely all over the island, the classic *Arachnis* Maggie Oei with its red and yellow ribbons, along with orchids named after Mandai Gardens, which has since closed down.

The gardeners find that pottering in the garden provides a calming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

People have the impression that orchids are expensive and hard to grow. But once you have the basic knowledge of propagation, anyone can grow orchids in the limited space they have. Anyone can have a green thumb – be brave and take the first step!

Elsie Chua
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador





The gardeners bond together over their common love for orchids.



Orchids are sensitive. When I first started volunteering, they would poke me with their sharp leaves. But over the years, I've been talking to them and we've developed a bond. Now, as I water them, they respond more positively to me.

Alan Ang
Garden Volunteer

Repotting

The community gardening group regularly organises small group sessions focused on repotting orchids. During these sessions, participants are taught techniques for repotting orchids that are loose in their pots, or which require a more appropriately sized pot. Each orchid variety, *Dendrobium*, *Vanda* or *Oncidium*, requires its own specific potting mix requirement to thrive.

Adopt an Orchid Initiative

The gardening members pre-select mature plants with vibrant flowers for its propagation workshops. At the workshop, participants are taught how to cut sections of their stems or roots and replant them in little pots. The cuttings are given away during the workshops and activities. They are also given out to schools, nursing homes, other community gardens, and the wider public.

The garden takes pride in the strong, lasting relationships it has cultivated over the years. A majority of its gardeners have been volunteering since the inception of the garden. Beyond gardening, volunteers share meals and enjoy outings together, further strengthening their sense of community.

PLANT FEATURES



Papilionanthe Ernest Chew



Aranda Lion's Gold



Aranda Noorah Alsagoff



Dendrobium Visa Peach



Papilionanda Andrea Bocelli



Holtumara Prapin



Papilionanda John Clubb



Papilionanda Tan Chay Yan

Collaboration with Other Organisations

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Let's Grow Orchid Garden at West Coast CC proudly helped Jamiyah Nursing Home to start its first mini orchid garden. Since then, it has continued to collaborate with the nursing home in developing the mini orchid garden, transforming it into a vibrant and inviting space for residents, nursing staff and visitors to enjoy. Through their collaboration, Jamiyah Nursing Home won the Garden of the Year and Top 50 Gardens Awards at the 2023 Community in Bloom Awards.



Members of the Let's Grow Orchid Garden at West Coast CC conduct workshops to teach participants to make scented bags and how to do eco printing on cotton tote bags.



Garden volunteers from the Let's Grow Orchid Garden at West Coast CC helped the Jamiyah Nursing Home and other organisations set up their own orchid garden.

Gardening Tip!

How can you tell if an orchid plant needs watering? If its aerial roots are a vibrant green, that means it is well-hydrated. On the other hand, if its roots are silvery or gray, it is a telltale sign that the plant is thirsty and in need of water.





Nurturing Kindness



Atop Block 813 Yishun Ring Road sits a thriving community garden where two signs tell its story.

The first, touching on its simplicity, reads “Plant kindness and watch it grow”. The second elaborates on its objective: “Our community garden is a shared space where individual gardeners have their own garden plots to cultivate flowers, fruits and vegetables. Not only do we bring together a community with a passion for gardening, but we are also actively encouraging sustainable and environmentally friendly practices while cultivating friendships.”



This rooftop haven is more than just a collection of garden plots – it is a place where sustainable practices flourish alongside community bonds. Here, residents come together, united by their passion for gardening and their commitment to environmental stewardship.

The garden exemplifies Singapore’s innovative approach to urban greenery, transforming the rooftop space into a vibrant community asset where neighbours become friends, and seeds of both plants and relationships take root.

After the garden group obtained approval from the relevant agencies to start the rooftop garden, they started with a few experimental plots. Despite initial mixed results, their persistence paid off. Led by Garden Leader Constance Chow, the volunteers from Nee Soon South Zone C RN (Residents’ Network) were successful in cultivating lush plants at the car park’s rooftop.

The garden now thrives with 46 plots and attracts visitors from across Singapore. Nearby residents regularly visit to enjoy the space and socialise. The garden has even become a habitat for wildlife – gardener Kenny Lim reports occasional sightings of birds, ranging from eagles to parakeets.

No land is so infertile that nothing can grow on it. You have to work the ground, you have to take the initiative to make it fertile, then you can grow things.

Constance Chow
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador



Growing and Sharing

Constance and her team actively support community gardening initiatives through plant donations and knowledge sharing. “We share many plants with other gardens that may need them,” she explains.

Their outreach extends to various organisations, including the Muhammadiyah Welfare Home in Bedok, Naval Base Primary School, and MOE Kindergarten in Yishun. Through workshops at their garden or external venues, Constance also shares her expertise in various topics including gardening, arts and crafts, and cooking.



Food Rescue

As part of their sustainability efforts, Constance’s team collect unsold produce. The edible produce are distributed to residents while the remainder are repurposed into fruit enzyme, minimising waste.

Creative Upcycling

Sustainability extends beyond plants in this garden. Discarded items find new life as artistic installations and informative signage throughout the space, reflecting the team’s commitment to creative reuse.

Garden to Kitchen

The team shares their culinary expertise by demonstrating how to transform garden ingredients into nutritious, flavourful meals during workshops.

Growing Success

Through the community’s collective efforts, the rooftop of the multi-storey car park at 813 Yishun Ring Road has transformed into an award-winning green space. By helping one another, the gardeners have also grown along with the garden. Constance recalls the time she helped guide a newcomer volunteer who had struggles with growing plants. Together, they managed to successfully cultivate the herbs in the Herbs Bar, bringing them great satisfaction.



Japanese Kai Lan (*Brassica oleracea* cultivar)

This cultivar produces rosettes of large leaves with green stems. It grows well in fertile loamy soil under full sun.



Barbados Cherry (*Malpighia glabra*)

A native species of Southern Texas to Venezuela and Ecuador, this cherry contains more Vitamin C than oranges or lemons. The fruit ripens from green to orange and red.

Gardening Tip!

Soil quality is most important for the success of plant growth. Your plants will not grow well if the soil is too sandy or lumpy. Plants grow best in loamy soil. To make your soil loamy, add nutrients to the soil via leaves, fruit peels, and worms. This makes the soil soft and moist, making it easier for roots to grow. Such organic soil amendments will eventually decompose and will need to be replaced.



Recipes

Baked Pumpkin



Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds fresh pumpkin, cut into 1-inch thick slices
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste



Steps:

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.
2. Drizzle with olive oil and rub on both sides of pumpkin.
3. Season with salt and spices to taste.
4. Wrap the pumpkin slices in baking foil.
5. Roast for 18–20 minutes, check at 15-minute mark.

Herbal Tea

Serves 6–8

Ingredients:

- 2–3 pieces pink oyster mushroom, dried
- 1 stick sugarcane (approximately 6 inches), cut into chunks
- 2 pandan leaves, knotted
- 100 g winter melon, cut into cubes
- 3–4 water chestnuts, peeled
- 2 slices pickled ginger
- 2 pieces Thai finger ginger, crushed
- 2 pieces white turmeric, sliced



Steps:

1. In a large pot, bring 2 L of water to a boil.
2. Add sugarcane chunks, pandan leaves, and both types of ginger (Thai finger ginger and pickled ginger).
3. Reduce heat to medium-low and add the dried pink oyster mushrooms, winter melon cubes, and sliced white turmeric.
4. Add the water chestnuts.
5. Simmer for 15–20 minutes or until the winter melon becomes tender and translucent.
6. Strain the tea before serving.



False Roselle (*Hibiscus acetosella*)

A striking ornamental shrub reaching 2 m in height. It has deep red, maple-like leaves and pink flowers. While the fruit of this plant resembles those of the Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), they are not fleshy or suitable for consumption. The plant prefers full sun, regular watering and adapts well to various soil conditions.



Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)

A woody climber that produces clusters of sweetly fragrant tubular flowers. Young flowers are white and mature to golden yellow, attracting butterflies and birds. This vine grows best in bright, filtered sun with regular watering but can tolerate brief dry periods.



Herbs Bar

A corner where residents come to gather ingredients to make a curry, a dessert or even a herbal brew. There is a great variety of spices and herbs for them to choose from.

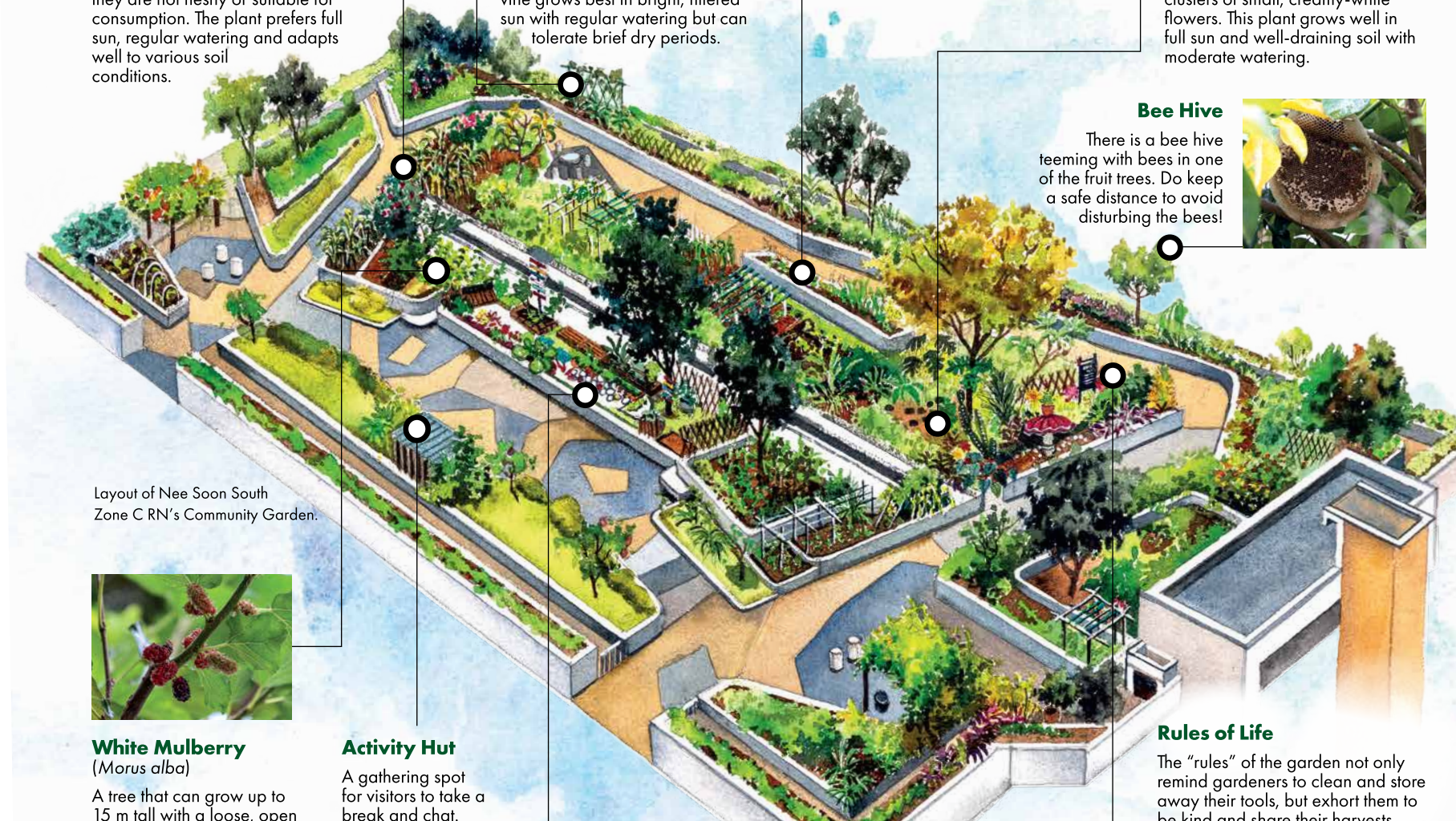


Lemon Myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*)

A tree that grows up to 8 m but can also be maintained as a 2 m tall, compact shrub. Its glossy green leaves release a lemon-like scent when crushed. It produces clusters of small, creamy-white flowers. This plant grows well in full sun and well-draining soil with moderate watering.

Bee Hive

There is a bee hive teeming with bees in one of the fruit trees. Do keep a safe distance to avoid disturbing the bees!



Layout of Nee Soon South Zone C RN's Community Garden.



White Mulberry (*Morus alba*)

A tree that can grow up to 15 m tall with a loose, open crown. It produces sweet, oblong-shaped berries that ripen to black and can be eaten raw. The heart-shaped leaves are also a food source for silkworms (*Bombyx mori*)! This hardy tree adapts well to full sun and can tolerate periodic drought when established.

Activity Hut

A gathering spot for visitors to take a break and chat.



Sensory Node

This section is specially designed for visitors to take in the beauty of, and interact with, nature.

Rules of Life

The "rules" of the garden not only remind gardeners to clean and store away their tools, but exhort them to be kind and share their harvests.





Gardening Without Fences



Nestled in the corner of a children's playground in Bedok Terrace, this community garden reimagines traditional boundaries. Instead of fences, carefully chosen plants define the garden space, creating a lush, welcoming design that seamlessly integrates with its surroundings. This softer approach using peripheral planting sets it apart from typical community gardens in Singapore, creating an accessible sanctuary for neighbourhood residents.

The garden's thoughtful design serves its community well. Mornings bring children and elderly residents accompanied by their caregivers, while throughout the day, dog walkers pause here on their daily routes. Garden Leader Judy Soo and her team of dedicated volunteers maintain this inviting atmosphere, encouraging residents to participate in the garden's upkeep and become part of its story.



A Vision Takes Root

The garden began with a simple conversation at a 2014 street party where residents from the Limau Estate RN (Residents' Network) expressed interest in creating a community garden. The idea naturally gained momentum and the community garden took shape through careful planning and collaborative effort.

After its initial establishment, it underwent an upgrade in April 2016, emerging with an even more refined aesthetic. The garden's refreshed design and natural connection with its surroundings earned it two accolades in the Community in Bloom Awards that same year: Best New Garden and the Gold Achievement Banding, signalling its achievement in garden quality, community involvement and environmental friendliness.

We chose to have peripheral planting instead of fences because we wanted to have an open concept, where residents could walk in and feel welcome.

Judy Soo
Garden Leader & CIB Ambassador





The Garden's Many Functions

The open design welcomes visitors who come seeking different experiences. Some find their calling in nature photography, with one resident capturing the garden's insect diversity, while another focuses on its uncommon spider species. Others turn to the garden for its practical and natural resources.

While the garden's open concept occasionally faces challenges like nighttime vandalism, its spirit of accessibility remains unwavering. The garden continues to thrive, with its harvests benefiting the wider community, such as produce contributed to the Siglap Hearty Meals programme by Siglap Community Club.

PLANT FEATURE



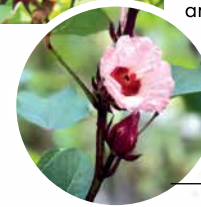
Traditional Plants

The garden has various plants used in local and cultural practices. Among them is Shiny Bush or *Peperomia pellucida*, which some residents collect for their traditional remedies. This herb features small glossy leaves, fleshy stems and tiny flowers on a spike. Growing to about 40 cm tall, it thrives in moist, shaded areas. Its compact size and minimal maintenance requirements make it a common sight in many community gardens.



Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)

Did you know that Roselle tea is not brewed from flowers? The fleshy red 'flower' used in the tea are the calyces – the cup-like structures that holds the flower. This shrub has ornamental pink flowers and green, lobed leaves. It can grow to 2 m in height and makes a good short hedge or border plant.



Variegated Purple Snakeweed *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis* (Variegated)

A shrub that can reach 1 m in cultivation. It has ornamental yellow leaves with green patches and long slender spikes of small purple flowers that attract butterflies for its nectar. It thrives in full sun which helps to retain the leaves' vibrant golden-green variegation.

The Tree House

This piece of art installation is a product of eco-activism and artistic ingenuity. Much of the structure was made from discarded or recycled material.



Layout of Limau Estate RN Bedok Terrace Playground Community Garden.

Ulam Raja (*Cosmos caudatus*)

An annual herbaceous plant with pink flowers that attract butterflies and bees. The deeply lobed, dark green leaves produce a lacy textural effect in the landscape. Young leaves can be eaten raw as *ulam* and have a pleasant, mango-like flavour. This hardy tropical plant is free-flowering in full sun, grows in well-draining soil and requires regular pruning to encourage bushy growth.



Barometer Bush (*Leucophyllum frutescens*)

A compact, ornamental shrub with leaves covered in soft, silvery grey hairs. The plant produces purple-pink flowers in response to wet weather, earning it the common name, Barometer Bush. The flowers also attract pollinators such as bees. This plant thrives in full sun with well-draining soil and is drought tolerant once established.



SPOTLIGHT

The Tree House

What could have remained an unsightly old tree base in one corner of the garden has instead cleverly become a whimsical tree house. Wood tiles form its roof, while many colourful ornaments bring it to life. Playful gnomes gather around a toadstool table, and toy dinosaurs peek out from behind bushes and perch on the rooftop.





Building a Green School

Tucked away in the grounds of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church in Gilstead Road is a little haven for children called the Far Eastern Kindergarten.

The school caters to 172 children, aged three to six, in two sessions. It has four classrooms – Pre-Nursery, Nursery, K1 and K2 – all on ground level. All the classrooms open out on one side to a margin of land which the school has converted into an eco-corridor.

Over the years, this school has weaved the principles of biodiversity and eco-sustainability into its curriculum so that the children can experience them in their everyday classroom activities.

Activities like digging, weeding, planting, watering and harvesting develop motor skills in children and create opportunities for them to develop teamwork and social skills.



Reuse, Repurpose and Recycle

These are the maxims the school lives by. Teachers and children bring used items from their homes to be repurposed into something beautiful or useful.

Whenever the school needs something, it will make its request to parents who will donate the item, whether it is material for a fundraising project, or props for a concert the school is putting up.

The principal, Ang Chui Hwa, walks the talk: she collects fresh flowers from the garden and uses them to decorate the school's reception area, or dries them for use in art classes.



Developing Character and Values

In 2016, the school started off their gardening initiative with a small section of the fence. Each child was given a lettuce seedling to germinate. Upon germination, the children would then transfer the seedlings to containers arranged vertically on the school's fence. Seeing the success of this initiative, the school management allocated more church grounds for gardening purposes.

"Good things don't happen instantly; they take time," says Chui Hwa.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the reverse. Since the children had to be isolated, they were all given a plant to take home. That taught them to care for their own plant. When they finally returned to school, their plants had flourished.

If a project falls through, never mind. It gives the children a chance to learn from their mistakes and do better next time.

Ang Chui Hwa
Principal



The planter designed to mimic the earthworms' habitat for the children to observe their movements and behaviour.

The Teaching of Culture and Art

The school uses elements of nature to teach the children about culture and art.

Besides learning how to use various spices to make delicious food, the children also learn how certain plants like the Indian Borage are used in traditional medicine.

The Teaching of Biodiversity and Eco-sustainability

The eco-corridor features many kinds of flora on racks, suspended from bars or growing from the ground. Each class takes care of the section of the corridor just outside their classroom.

The children's class projects are displayed in the corridor on trays, in plastic bottles and other recycled receptacles.

In one corner of a planter filled with soil, the children helped to build an "earthworm tower". Through the "earthworm tower", the children get to observe and learn more about the earthworms' behaviour. In the other corner, children plant leafy vegetables.



The principles of biodiversity and eco-sustainability are woven into the school's curriculum and everyday class activities.

Edible Landscape

The garden has a section for edibles. The produce from this section is harvested and cooked in the kitchen so the children understand how food journeys from garden to table. Fruit peels and vegetable scraps from the kitchen are turned into compost.

Lessons learnt from the garden are reiterated in the classroom where teachers teach the children about the importance of proper diet and nutrition for health.

The teachers also introduce topics like food sustainability and Singapore's food security in simple terms that the children can understand. Students learn about food wastage, hydroponics and other farming methods, and the import of food.





Thinking Skills and Problem Solving

The children take part in project work to help them think and solve problems. In one such project, they were told to recreate a mangrove swamp using recycled materials. As part of this project, they made models of various trees with buttress roots, stilt roots and pencil roots as well as models of animals such as crocodiles, spiders, mudskippers, frogs and eels.

The teachers talk to the children about issues such as environment protection, climate change and soil erosion in simple terms. The children are tasked to write their reflections and discuss them.

Far Eastern Kindergarten has twice won the School of the Year (Pre-school Category) Community in Nature Schools Award, an NParks initiative.



Colourful posters break down complicated subjects for the children. They help the children understand complex topics like global warming and climate change, food production and distribution, famine and food shortage, deforestation, sustainable farming and fishing.



Aloe
(*Aloe vera*)

A succulent plant with thick, fleshy leaves that grow in a rosette pattern. The leaves contain a sticky gel with skin-soothing properties. Parts of the leaves are edible and can be added to drinks and desserts. It grows best under full sun and very well-draining and porous soil.



Calamansi
(*Citrus × microcarpa*)

A compact shrub that produces fragrant white flowers and small round, sour fruits. Be careful of the occasional thorns on the stems! The fruit juice of this sun-loving plant can be used in seafood-based dishes or in desserts and drinks.



Compost

Plants need nutrition, just like people. They get their nutrition from the decomposition of organic material like vegetables and fruit peels.



DIY Containers

The children help to make these DIY containers, learning how to upcycle in the process.



Earthworm Tower

Here, children observe the behaviour of earthworms.



Sponge Gourd
(*Luffa aegyptiaca*)

A vigorous climber with large lobed leaves, bright yellow flowers and cylindrical fruit that can grow up to 30 cm long. Young fruit are soft and edible and can be cooked as a vegetable in soups and stir-fries. Mature fruit become fibrous and spongy and can be dried and used as natural scrubbing sponges. This sun-loving plant grows best on support structures, in rich, well-draining soil and with regular watering.



Blue Daze Flower
(*Evolvulus glomeratus*)

A low-growing herbaceous plant with small, hairy, green leaves and striking blue flowers that attract bees. It flowers best under full sun and with regular watering and occasional pruning to encourage flowering.



Layout of Far Eastern Kindergarten's Community Garden.

The eco-corridor is where the children discover the marvels of nature. The edibles section helps them understand the concept of sustainability and how food journeys from garden to table. The ornamentals section helps them understand the concept of biodiversity as it attracts butterflies and insects which pollinate the plants, including those found in the garden's Edible plot.



Coursing Through the River of Life

The garden embodies the history and culture of the area.



Painting Singapore's culture and early history onto the benches near the garden.

Located by the banks of the Rochor Canal is a charming garden filled with history and nostalgia. Started in 2014, the garden is very close to the mouth of the Singapore River, where the history of modern Singapore began.

When the time came to revamp the garden in 2021, the gardening group from Kampong Glam Kelantan RN (Residents' Network) seized the opportunity to weave the area's rich history and cultural heritage into its new design. Besides cultural preservation, practicality remained paramount; with a majority of elderly residents in the vicinity, the garden's layout needed to prioritise accessibility and senior-friendly features.



These planters are designed to resemble the sampans that used to ply the river to transport goods upstream on the river in the past.

When looking for design ideas, the one thing the gardening group thought best represented the area was the sampan, since the garden is located close to the hotbed of Singapore's early history as a trading port. The *tongkangs* (locally built wooden bumboats) and bigger boats from China and other parts of the world would be unloading their goods at godowns near the mouth of the river. Sampans would distribute the goods to various points further up the river. The painted patterns on the sampans inspired the look of the planters in the garden.



The planters are built in a way that allows elderly residents and those on wheelchairs to work the soil without bending their backs.

The two Garden Leaders, Li Juan and Eunice Teng, are more like family elders than leaders. They have about 30 volunteers helping out.

Both share in the responsibilities of running the place. Li Juan oversees the gardening and cooking, while Eunice does the communications and the liaison with authorities. She also looks after the volunteers' health and safety.

"Most of our volunteers are elderly, and some are on wheelchairs," explains Eunice. "So, we need to be flexible and let them come when they can. They all know the combination lock number so they can come in anytime. This arrangement works for us."



Eunice Teng
Garden Leader

We feel privileged to be so close to the hotbed of Singapore's early civilisation.

Li Juan (centre) and Eunice Teng (right) with a fellow gardener.



Nurturing Plants and People

At the heart of this garden lies a deeper purpose: nurturing both plants and people. Through carefully designed gardening activities, residents are encouraged to forge meaningful connections with nature, embracing the therapeutic benefits that come from tending to growing things. This approach stems from the well-established principle that nurturing plants and participating in nature-based activities can enhance mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

The garden showcases an impressive collection of aromatic herbs and spices such as Basil, Mint, Rosemary and Ginger, complemented by local favourites like Lemongrass and Indian Borage. Looking ahead, there are plans to expand this plant collection, introducing more plants that will engage multiple senses – sight, smell, and touch – creating a truly immersive natural sanctuary where stress melts away and spirits are lifted.





Community Outreach

Many residents, mostly elderly, come to the garden to chit-chat and make friends. The garden is situated close to the Wesley Senior Centre and the children's playground, so they have elderly residents and children joining in the garden activities.

The plants and herbs grown in the garden reflect the residents' preferences. Many are common herbs Singaporeans use in their cooking: There are Pandan leaves, used to make many local cakes. There are also Blue Pea flowers, or *Bunga Telang*, whose dye is used to colour glutinous rice and other Peranakan cakes. Tapioca is another favourite with the residents.

Every now and then, Li Juan will prepare a snack for the volunteers using the produce from the garden, such as chiffon cake (using pandan leaves), steamed corn or tapioca cake.

Arts & Craft

The gardening group invites guest instructors to come and teach their volunteers various arts and craft. Some of the crafts they learned include Chinese calligraphy, lantern-making, scentbag art and recycling art. One of the highlights was using mostly flowers and herbs from the garden to create a rangoli – a traditional Indian art form.



The gardeners come together to celebrate with food, gardening, and arts and craft.





Gardening Tip!



Turmeric
(*Curcuma longa*)

When choosing fresh turmeric to grow, look for those with visible growth buds (eyes). Cut turmeric into sections, with each piece having 2 to 3 buds. Allow them to dry overnight before planting into the soil.



Avocado
(*Persea americana*)

Look for smooth skinned fruit varieties or those that are known to grow within the Southeast Asian region, so that there is a higher chance of flowering and fruiting.



Rosemary
(*Salvia rosmarinus*)

Rosemary grows best under full sun, and does not like wet feet (soggy soil around its roots) so allow the soil (media) to dry out slightly before watering again.



Pandan
(*Pandanus amaryllifolius*)

Pandan loves the sun, so choose a sunny spot with well-drained soil for optimum growth.





Plant Adoption

The gardeners come together regularly to propagate new plants from seeds or stem cuttings. These are placed on a rack for residents take freely – their way to promote neighbourliness.



The gardeners love my chiffon and tapioca cakes, so sometimes I bake for them using ingredients from the garden.

Li Juan
Garden Leader

SPOTLIGHT



The Sampan Planters

There are some interesting details painted into the sampan planters. The first is the eye. In Chinese lion dance, the action of dotting the eye of the lion dance costume awakens its spirit. Likewise, dotting the eye of the boat gives it life. The eye also acts as a load waterline by marking the water level at which the sampan is fully loaded and cannot take more cargo.

Another detail is the colour. In the early days of Singapore, the boats are painted in different colours to represent the different dialect groups. However, most of the sampan planters in the garden are painted in multi-colours.

The old garden had plots at ground level. The sampan planters were built at about waist level to cater to elderly volunteers who cannot bend their backs, and to those on wheelchairs.



Beauty in the Void Deck

The Bishan East Zone 1 RN (Residents' Network) Green Hub in the void deck of Blk 112 Bishan Street 12 is striking with its recycled art using all kinds of rescued items including a bath tub, an old sewing machine and an unused toilet bowl!

The original garden was situated in this same block. No one can remember how it started. At that time, residents just donated their plants to a gardener who would place them on the grass verge. Later, the garden was moved to the badminton court at Blk 106. But that was fenced up and residents could go in only when the gardener was around.

At that point, some of the RN members started to conceptualise this present garden in the void deck, but there were challenges they had to overcome. On top of that, COVID-19 was looming on the horizon. They went ahead with their plans anyway. Then the lockdowns and social distancing measures kicked in, and they thought that was the end of the project. But COVID-19 turned out to be a blessing, because it gave them the time and space they needed to firm up their plans.

By the time the restrictions were lifted, the garden was ready to bloom!



This vertical planter was once a shoe rack. The Green Hub rescues used items and turns them into works of art.

The Five Pillars

When the garden was being set up, the committee wanted something to remind people of the original reason for starting the garden.

The committee noticed the five pillars at the void deck and thought they were perfect for this purpose. Each pillar would represent one of the committee's five corporate objectives – Arts, Lifestyle, Community, Sustainability and Greenery.

With their artistic talents, the volunteers painted the five pillars into stunning works of art. After they were done, they planted their handprints on another wall – perhaps to seal their pledge!



We are always networking with organisations and trying to organise new activities for the Green Hub.

Fen Ng
Garden Leader & CIB Ambassador



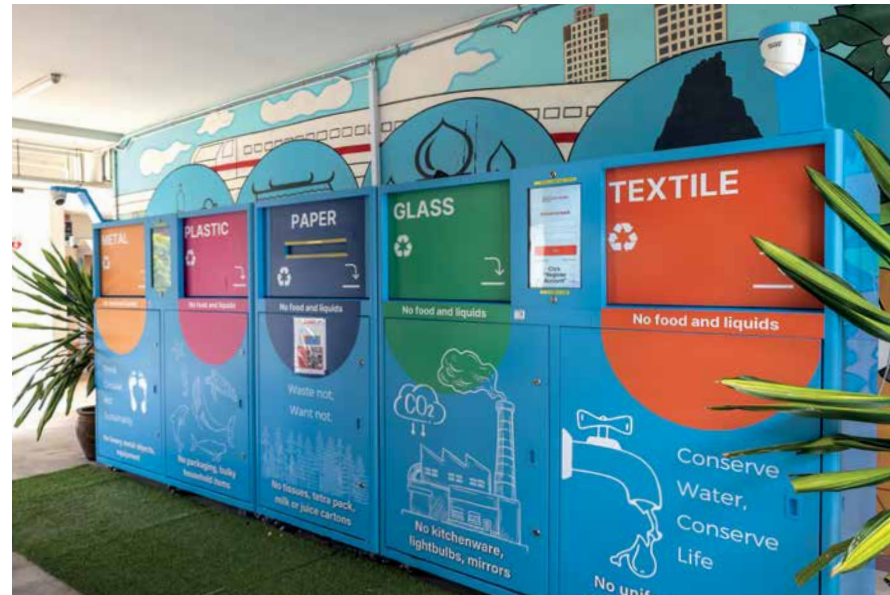
Strong Culture of Recycling

The Green Hub has two Garden Leaders who plan the activities and assign duties to the seven regular volunteers: Julie Lim is in charge of the gardening activities and volunteers, while Fen Ng takes care of public relations, curates the indoor space and gives creative direction.

Over the years, this garden community has developed a strong culture of recycling. Reduce, recycle, reuse, repurpose – this is by now a familiar slogan to the residents of the area.

Volunteers rescue used or discarded items from all over the island. The bathtub was rescued from Tanjong Rhu; the toilet bowl from Sengkang.

Residents also contributed their pre-loved items such as furniture. These items are free for anyone to take; otherwise, they are repurposed or turned into art pieces.



With some imagination, the gardeners and volunteers turned used objects into works of art.

We have won many awards, but we don't work for the awards. We work because we have the passion for gardening.

Julie Lim
Garden Leader &
CIB Ambassador

Upcycling

The Green Hub looks like a modern art museum with art installations placed in various sections. The way the gardeners built the plants and incorporated greenery into the displays shows much ingenuity!

One section recreates an old house filled with nostalgic objects. The guest area has a pair of Chinese rosewood chairs with a giant bottle of cognac on the side table. The bathroom has a giant Bird's Nest Fern (*Asplenium nidus*) sitting in an old bathtub. Music lovers will be enthralled with the living room shelf with gramophones, a Sony Walkman, long-playing vinyls and other music paraphernalia.

Other art installations are more modern. One is a collection of pots, pans, ladles and bird-cages, while wicker baskets, shoe racks and water basins are converted into planters in another installation – a charming idea!



The story of the Bicycle on the Wall

"Once we saw a bicycle parked in the garden and we thought it belonged to someone. A few days passed before we noticed that the chains were missing. Then we realised that someone had put it there for us to use. So, we got Sarkisan, a well-known batik artist, and his daughter to make it into wall art. That's how the bicycle ended up on the wall." – Julie Lim





The food rescue culture encourages thrift and promotes the concept of food sustainability.

Green Hub to the Rescue

“Can I take some vegetables?” a passer-by asks.

“Can! These are for residents,” says Alice Leong, one of the volunteers.

The committee not only rescues food from the garden, but also collects bread approaching their expiry dates donated by bakeries – all these are shared freely.

This rescue culture did not happen overnight. It took some time for the residents to see the big picture, that food rescue is not just for saving a few dollars but for sustainability and saving the earth.

We rescue everything – bread, fruit, vegetables, anything that is still useful, or can still be consumed.

Alice Leong
Garden Volunteer

A Meeting Point

Residents also use this space to bond and have fun. They would book the space to hold their birthday parties or private functions. Every Saturday afternoon, residents would gather to play Rummy-O.

During festive occasions such as Christmas, Chinese New Year, Hari Raya and Pongal, the committee organises little get-togethers for residents to celebrate together.



Going Digital

The gardening group is on Facebook and other social media platforms. That makes it easier for their volunteers to communicate with each other and with residents. They are also connected via WhatsApp.



Children attending a workshop.



Residents enjoying a Rummy-O session.



A lively sing-along session.



The void deck turned into a catwalk.



The Green Hub was the location for the Mrs Singapore Chinatown 2023 photoshoot.

SPOTLIGHT

Location shoot for Mrs Singapore Chinatown 2023

The organisers of Mrs Singapore Chinatown were looking for a nostalgic place when they discovered the Green Hub. They saw many angles they could use for their shoot. The 16 contestants were also excited about having the photoshoot at the Green Hub.





Gardens That Nurture More Than Just Plants

At the United World College of South East Asia (East Campus), nature is never far away. For students and staff in need of a moment to de-stress, there is no shortage of green spaces to retreat to. From the tranquil Herb and Orchid Gardens to Survival Island, the Hive, the Rain Garden, the Infant Sky Garden, and the vibrant Urban Garden known as the 'Nest', each pocket of greenery offers a sanctuary of calm and connection.



These green spaces do more than provide places to unwind. They bring people together, creating opportunities to share gardening knowledge while fostering appreciation for nature. "The school wanted to create little pockets of nature where the community could experience biodiversity and appreciate the beauty of flora and fauna," shares Rehna Mohd Minhaj, the school's Landscape Executive. "We now have nine unique gardens, each with its own distinct character."

These spaces are designed as a unified ecosystem. Rainwater collected from the Rain Garden is distributed throughout the campus to irrigate each green space, ensuring that sustainability is woven into the fabric of daily life.



The school wanted to create little pockets of nature where the school community can appreciate flora and fauna in a bio-diverse environment. We created nine little gardens, each with its own character.

Rehna Mohd Minhaj
Landscape Executive &
CIB Ambassador



There is a wide variety of herbs and spices to appeal to the community with a diverse student population.

The Herb Garden

Food brings people together in this herb garden, where staff and students' parents collect fresh spices and share recipes. With the school's international community, the garden has become a hub for discovering diverse culinary traditions.

Staff volunteers Jino Samir and Toni Chong manage the garden with help from parent volunteers.

"The garden has a wide variety of herbs. The Europeans and westerners like Mint, Rosemary, Basil and Oregano. The locals like the Curry Leaf, Chilli and Pandan leaves. Filipinos like me like the Calamansi. We put it in all our dishes," says Jino, the school's transport manager, who enjoys cooking.

The garden operates on a sharing basis. Anyone can harvest herbs after learning proper picking techniques to protect the plants. Some visitors contribute by bringing new herb varieties to grow, creating a cycle of giving and growing.



Composting is done centrally for all the seven gardens.

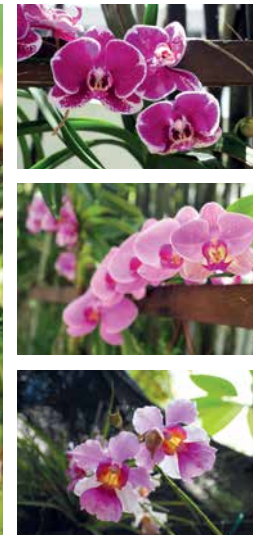
The Composting Unit

Adjacent to the Herb Garden is the central composting station, which produces most of the compost needs of all the gardens.

Students of all ages – from the nursery to upper levels – are involved with the eco-drive at every stage, starting with composting. They may bring home a pail to collect compostable materials from their kitchens to bring back to school. They are taught to put in fruit peels and vegetables and not to throw in meats and plastics.



From an early age, the children are involved in the push towards sustainability. For starters, they collect food waste from their kitchens to be turned into compost.



The Orchid Garden has a good collection of orchids.

Miss Joaquim's Orchid Garden

Tucked beside the campus driveway and screened by Black Bamboo (*Bambusa lako*), this semi-shaded garden is dedicated to orchids. A variety of species are grown on fences, driftwood, and suspended lines, all supported by an automated irrigation system.

This space has become a favourite among parents, many of whom regularly gather to care for the orchids, learn about propagation techniques, and share gardening tips. The joy of orchid cultivation has created a strong sense of community and deepened the gardeners' understanding of each plant's unique characteristics.

The school's gardens do far more than beautify the campus – they form the heart of a vibrant, eco-conscious learning community where sustainability, science, and social connection are sown, cultivated, and celebrated.

I met many like-minded people here, and made many friends. There are so many activities I can choose to be involved with in the school. I chose gardening because gardening gives life.

Divya Malhotra
Parent Volunteer



Here's where we learn with a purpose about plants, and see how urban gardens like this can make a positive impact on the environment.

Andy Ware
The school's Head of Science



Plots are available for students to work on their projects.



The Rooftop Urban Garden – ‘Nest’

The ‘Nest’ is a hub of activity and learning. Here, students can be found making compost, cultivating seedlings, or tending to individual allotment plots. “This is where we explore the concept of plants with a purpose and the role that urban gardens can play in creating a more sustainable world,” says Andy Ware, Head of Science.

Students from both the Primary and Middle Schools conduct biology experiments in the ‘Nest’ – measuring rainfall, comparing propagation methods, and documenting the growth of various species. Once established, cuttings from this rooftop garden are transferred to the ‘Hive’, a network of gardens managed by the younger pupils.

Students who wish to have their own garden plot must follow a structured process. They start by researching crop choices, growing methods, and planting schedules. Next, they submit a proposal to the garden committee for review. After completing their gardening project, students must write a reflection detailing their experience and challenges.

Rescuing Trees from Extinction

The school also dedicates part of its Urban Garden to a rainforest tree nursery. This space plays a vital role in conserving endangered native species such as *Diospyros oblonga*, *Hopea sulcata*, *Hopea bracteata*, *Hopea ferrea*, *Hopea odorata*, and *Hopea helferi*.

Saplings are propagated and nurtured on campus before being planted across Singapore by student volunteers, including sites along the Rail Corridor and within the Singapore Botanic Gardens. This initiative forms part of the nationwide OneMillionTrees movement and is conducted in partnership with the College’s sister campus, UWCSEA Dover.



Hopea odorata



Hopea helferi



Diospyros oblonga

Gardens by the Bus Bay and the Food Forest

A charming space named ‘Gardens by the Bus Bay’ – coined by a student – features fruit trees that attract bees and birds. Adjacent to this, a 70 m stretch along the perimeter fence has been transformed into a thriving Food Forest, modelled on permaculture principles to create a self-sustaining ecosystem.

Here, a rich variety of fruit trees flourish – chiku, jackfruit, pomegranate, as well as rarer species such as cacao, dragonfruit, and fig. The school also experiments with natural fertilisation using chicken droppings collected from a small coop lined with wood shavings. This nutrient-rich compost has accelerated the fruiting rates of trees.



Experiments in using chicken droppings as soil appear to be successful in accelerating the fruiting process.



This garden was designed to keep the young children occupied.



Infant Sky Garden

Atop the Infant School block, the open-air rooftop has been converted into a safe, interactive garden for the school’s youngest students. Children are led through floral tunnels and vibrant flower beds, where they experience nature through sight, smell, and touch. Highlights include a sensory corner with fragrant herbs and the striking Red Butterfly plant (*Christia obcordata*).

CONCLUSION

Over the past two decades, the Community in Bloom (CIB) initiative has blossomed into a nationwide movement, weaving nature into the very fabric of Singapore's urban landscape.

Today, CIB is a cornerstone of Singapore's efforts to bring people and nature closer together. By improving access to greenery and therapeutic landscapes, this initiative allows more members to enjoy the health and well-being benefits of nature. Through collaborative efforts, CIB unites residents, schools, and organisations in creating and maintaining green spaces that are more than places for growing plants. These spaces offer an opportunity to everyone – be it seasoned gardener or curious beginner – to experience the joy of doing a meaningful activity together. They enhance social connection and well-being and serve as vital oases for urban biodiversity. They are also a testament to the power of collective efforts in shaping a greener, more sustainable Singapore for generations to come.

Looking ahead, the continued growth of the CIB network promises even more vibrant and connected neighbourhoods, with NParks' introduction of the Grow and Share initiative in 2025 to encourage gardening groups to extend their outreach even further. Under this initiative, community gardens are invited to scale up their efforts, by sharing fresh produce with the needy, hosting open gardens, or conducting gardening sessions for the broader community.

With the set-up of each new garden, we hope to plant the seeds for a future where community spirit and nature will continue to thrive, while Singapore's vision of a City in Nature is being realised.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is made possible with generous donations through the Garden City Fund.

The Garden City Fund is a registered charity and Institution of a Public Character (IPC) established by the National Parks Board. The Fund works with corporations, organisations and individuals to better engage members of the public through conservation efforts, research, outreach and education. In doing so, we hope to cultivate a sense of ownership and encourage the community to play its part in preserving Singapore's legacy as a lush and vibrant City in Nature.

If you would like to support our projects, please visit www.gardencityfund.gov.sg.



The editorial team would like to thank the Management of NParks, whose support and guidance were invaluable to the book, especially Ms Hwang Yu-Ning, Chief Executive Officer; Dr. Tan Puay Yok, Executive Director, National Parks and Gardens Cluster, and Group Director, Singapore Botanic Gardens, and Chief Science and Technology Officer; and Ms Sophianne Araib, Executive Director, Jurong Lake Gardens, Horticulture & Community Cluster, and Group Director, Horticulture & Community.

We would like to acknowledge our NParks colleagues for their contributions to the book:

Ang Wee Foong, Azza Dina, Chai Weili, Erika Halim, Faye Woo, Felix Siew, Goh Yi Hui, Hong Zhongzhi, Ilaika Hamzah, Jacqueline Chua, Jennie Tang Yurue, Kezia Tan, Ng Jia Le, Pauline Tay Chai Lian, Pepper Teo Yisun, Phang Qiao Yi Joanne, Siti Rafe'ah Binte Omer, Soh Weijing, Thomas Lee Kay Liang, Victoria Cheong, Voon Tin Keat, and colleagues maintaining NParks Flora and Fauna Web.

We are grateful to the gardeners from the 20 community gardens featured in this book for accommodating our visits and generously sharing their photos and anecdotes.

We would also like to express our thanks to the following groups for their kind assistance in coordinating garden visits and collating content on the featured community gardens: various Residents' Networks, Residents' Committees and Neighbourhood Committees; and the staff of schools and organisations featured in the book.

We greatly appreciate the CIB Ambassadors for sharing their passion and promoting gardening to the wider community.

We are thankful for the efforts of our former NParks colleagues, led by Mr Ng Cheow Kheng, and the pioneering gardeners, who started CIB together – your contributions were instrumental in shaping CIB into the vibrant initiative it is today.

Last but not least, we would like to extend a big thank you to all community gardeners, past and present, for your dedication to nurturing community gardens across Singapore!

Started in 2005, Community in Bloom is a nation-wide gardening movement that aims to cultivate friendships among local gardeners, reach out to the neighbourhood community, and forge unique visual identities for the neighbourhoods – all through the love of gardening. It started with just one community garden; today, in just 20 years, there are more than 2,000 spread across the island that are registered under this movement!

Come explore the stories behind various community gardens in Singapore, as seen through the eyes of residents, and learn about their experiences, memories and recipes while they transform their communities and contribute to Singapore becoming a City in Nature.



NParks' Publication

